

Footprint of Cinderella

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CHAPTER I

It was 1910 and even Philadelphia, which had a reputation for somnolence, was awakening. The Merry Widow sailor, which had cast its shadow over Teddy Bears hugged to the persons of smart ladies, was about to be relegated to the attic. The bucket hat was coming in. Gentlemen wore shoes with swollen toes, and elegant waistcoats. A few Indians remained to be slain for the betterment of mankind. It was still good advice to "Go West," and the rumblings, which in 1914 turned Europe upside down and possibly went a long way to modernize it, had not yet been heard.

In Rittenhouse Square, where the descendants of a thrifty colonial line still survived, noisy and clumsy automobiles vied for road room with victorias, traps and hansom cabs. The occupants of both the ancient and the modern vehicles frequently pointed to the mansion of Jonathan Leigh. It was like its fellows--a severe and uninteresting exterior housing century-old internal elaborations of decoration and design. It bore with a stiff aloofness the scandal which it had so recently harbored.

In this age scandal would scarcely be applied to the events which had taken place in the great house, but in 1910 it was still considered outrageous for the last male member of a glittering and opulent Philadelphia family to take in wedlock a concert singer. The romance of Jonathan Leigh and Daisy Storey had been their own business; the world knew only the facts but they were sufficiently glamorous.

Young Leigh had met Daisy while he was studying at Oxford. At that time the multitudes who attended the music halls were given the privilege of hearing her golden voice and the favors of her smile. The world at large never knew of Jonathan and Daisy punting along the Thames, discussing sometimes bitterly and sometimes wistfully the almost hopeless difference in their respective stations in life. The world never knew of their promises, their pledges and their engagement. To Jonathan the engagement meant that many people whom he called his friends would desert him and that he would bring back to Philadelphia a bride whom his social circle would disdain. To Daisy it meant that her love for the young American would be a burden to him--which possibly showed how much she cared for him.

An unhappy couple who pledged their troth. They were destined not to be married for some time, however, for Jonathan's father, possibly in receipt of rumors, summoned him back to the United States, and Daisy Storey was snatched from the music hall to the stage of grand opera

in one breath-taking migration. They met two years later in New York City, while a rabid audience was still thundering its applause, and they were married on the next day. The newspapers had not yet invented scare heads but they did themselves extraordinarily proud with the story of Jonathan Leigh's marriage to Daisy Storey.

Mrs. Cornish-Griggs said: "I know the type perfectly, my dear. She has a golden voice . . . and Jonathan will never hear the end of it."

Mrs. Wadley Butler laughed somewhat rancidly: "I went to the cemetery to-day" (the survivors of old Philadelphia families spent much of their time in the cemetery) "just to see if Jonathan's father was turning in his grave."

Somebody else said, "How gruesome," and another lady laughed.

This was on the day after the wedding and these people generated a high or perhaps a very low degree of refrigeration which, insofar as Daisy Storey Leigh was concerned, turned the Philadelphia landscape into ice--ice that was sharp enough to cut if she slipped even in the slightest degree.

The most distressed of them all was Chloe Laforge-Leigh, Jonathan's sister. The reasons for that distress were never wholly apparent. Her life was wrapped up in two things--the glory of the Leighs and the Laforges, and her brother. She had never contemplated the possibility of his marriage, for Chloe was shortsighted. Any conscious presuming of such an eventuality would doubtless have depicted a sister-in-law made of the smug, tepid and inanimate stuff of the Philadelphia debutante of the early twentieth century. Chloe felt that the opera singer had stolen her brother body and soul and had defamed him. She hated Daisy Storey with an undying, unyielding and single hatred which increased steadily.

It increased particularly after Daisy's return with her husband to Philadelphia, when Chloe perceived that the people were beginning to like the former opera singer, to take her up socially and forget her obscure origin. It reached its climax when Chloe learned one day that Daisy was to be the mother of Jonathan Leigh's child. Chloe usually kept excellent control of herself but under those circumstances she lost that control. She went directly to her brother.

"Isn't there some feeling of shame in you, Jonathan, when you think that you are introducing as heir of a flawless line a child whose mother is a common--"

Jonathan said, "Chloe!" He said it in such a way that his sister stopped. He paced moodily back and forth in his library for a time and then spoke again. "It is going to be necessary, Chloe, for me to speak plainly. I realize that your offer to stay here with us in Rittenhouse Square and to assist with my wife's introduction to Philadelphia society is not motivated entirely by good-will. On more than one occasion it has occurred to me that you have remained in the house with my wife and myself not to help us but to make life more difficult for her. I am glad that you have expressed your true sentiments about Daisy. I prefer honest antagonisms to poisonous sweetness."

Chloe cried. Jonathan Leigh found himself patting her shoulder and stupidly repeating, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

Afterward his sister was more careful to cover the devious ramifications of her thoughts. She became something of a recluse but she ran the Leigh household perfectly according to her traditions.

In 1911 the child was born. It was named Muriel. If Leigh was disappointed in having a daughter instead of a son he showed no trace of that disappointment. Daisy was ecstatically happy but from the time of the birth of Muriel she began to fail steadily in health. That circumstance worried Leigh continually and it worried him at a time when he had a multitude of

other things on his mind.

The house of Leigh and the house of Laforge had originated respectively in England and France. They had always been empire builders. They had renounced titles to colonize America before the Revolution and scions of both families had moved steadily from the Atlantic toward the Pacific. They had accumulated vast wealth which had been poured through the funnel of inheritance into the possession of Jonathan.

At the turn of the century he not only owned vast properties, but various new industries and enterprises had attracted his interest. The era marked the beginning of the great oil booms and oil had already been discovered on some of his properties. He was pioneering in hydroelectricity; he owned coal and copper mines. At the end of the century's first decade it was oil particularly which absorbed him and his life was divided equally between that interest, his newly born daughter, and the waning health of the wife, whom he adored.

Two events-occurred simultaneously. Leigh walked into the yellow bedroom where his wife had spent many weary weeks in a convalescence that never ended and he found her pale and distraught.

"I am afraid I have bad news, darling."

Leigh's face smiled but his whole spirit was chilled. "Yes?" he said gently.

"The specialists we sent for called this morning. They didn't give me the name of whatever makes me so weak but they did tell me that there was only one place in the world where it could be cured. A doctor they know about has a hospital in the middle of the woods, high up on the mountain, in Germany. They said I must go there at once, and they advised me to take the baby with me for the good of the baby as well as myself. I would have to be there for quite a while-six months maybe."

Leigh felt himself relax a little. "Is that all?"

His wife smiled. "Isn't that enough? Leaving you, taking the child away from you, the expense--"

"Expense! You don't honestly mean that you thought about the expense?"

"But I hate to be an unnecessary burden, dear."

"Don't ever use that word. If that is what you must do, that is what you must do. We will have a private car take you to New York; we will have the finest suite on the best ship; we will have another private car meet you to carry you to Switzerland and I will go with you."

"Johnny!"

"We are going to get you well again, Daisy, so you will be able to sing and dance and play with your baby--"

After that there was an interlude of silence.

But when Daisy Storey Leigh sailed for Germany her husband was not with her. On the day the doctors had pronounced their decision a telegram had come from the West. Somewhere on Jonathan Leigh's property a hole had been made in the ground, nitroglycerine had been lowered into it and a weight had been dropped on the explosive. The earth had heaved and new riches had hurled themselves into the sky. Oil! Lakes of it--rivers of it. Shrewd men schemed to wrest the possession of this new, rich land from Leigh. A battle-front of business had been formed overnight. Leigh was needed. Daisy made him go.

"You can join me in Germany as soon as you are through with this. Maybe on the next boat."

The doctors assured him that it would be safe for Daisy to travel without him. Chloe

volunteered to accompany her sister-in-law. Reluctantly Leigh saw his wife carried out on the Hudson River on an ocean liner, and with a heavy sadness he caught a westbound train. He never forgot the picture of her, standing by the rail. Under her big hat he could see the bright amber of her hair and the deep blue of her eyes. He could see her courageous smile and her pale cheeks. By her side stood the nurse holding the baby, and Chloe, prim, showing already the grimness of a premature maidenhood.

Leigh never saw his wife again.

CHAPTER II

Nobody fully knew the relationship that existed between Chloe Laforge-Leigh and Daisy Storey Leigh. Jonathan had had glimpses of it but he had done his best to discount the truth, particularly because he was accustomed to Chloe's devious mind and minute plottings and because, from a masculine point of view, it was worth a certain silent hostility to have his house ornamented and managed by a person who had the entire ritual of Philadelphia society at her fingertips.

Chloe had her own reasons for hating Daisy Storey. To those reasons was swiftly added the conduct of Daisy herself, who met the meanness and the calculated, subtle cattiness of her sister-in-law with the unendurable reprisal of sweet smiles. Daisy Storey suffered much from Chloe, but she never gave Chloe the satisfaction of a knowledge of her suffering. And Chloe, jealous, repressed, smoldering, allowed hate to pile up on hate until she derived a perverse pleasure from a constant association with her brother's wife.

Life on shipboard kept the two women continually together. They wore on each other's nerves incessantly and although Daisy did not show it, she was as unhappy secretly as Chloe was visibly angry. Chloe had a genius for tormenting her. Under a pretext of aiding health, she would leave the baby in the bright sunshine until its face and arms were an angry red. During the first few days at sea she would deliberately order for Daisy's meals those foods which she knew Daisy disliked. And in a hundred secret ways she made her bitterness felt.

Despite that psychological handicap, Daisy's condition improved slowly. She arranged a special cabin for the nurse and the baby so that her child was liberated from Chloe's clutches. The wind and sun and salt air revived her and she drank deep drafts of all three from a deck-chair. Presently she was able to walk a little and by the time they were two days away from the French coast, she spent most of her time strolling gravely about the deck--the cynosure of the eyes of both sexes of passengers.

When they were but a day from land, the ship ran into a storm. From midnight until morning the wind blew with increasing violence. The waves piled up, grim and enormous. The clouds settled, the horizon narrowed. Chloe locked herself in her stateroom and remained abed, indignant at life and the elements. Daisy, however, delighted in rough weather. The return of her strength gave her considerable confidence.

With a few sturdy passengers she took a post on the promenade deck and watched the age-old and dramatic struggle of man and his insignificant vessels through the mighty hills and valleys of the sea.

At ten o'clock in the morning and again at noon she visited her baby. At one she dined in the salon with a handful of passengers whose words and gestures indicated the stimulation they

had derived from the weather.

It seemed to Daisy that her strength was increasing hourly with the strength of the storm. She began to feel on the afternoon of that day that she had needed some such tumultuous outburst to shake from her the lethargy of the past few months. After lunch she was again on deck, tendrils of her hair blown free by the wind, her slender form wrapped in a mackintosh and a tam o'shanter on her head. She surprised the quartermaster by appearing on the bridge and watching from that vantage point the duel of ocean and ship. Her baby was asleep when she visited it at four o'clock. Shortly afterward an unnatural dark fell. Someone saw her toward five o'clock making her way along the shunting decks, her eyes bright, fresh color in her cheeks--a woman transformed into a goddess of the storm. After that no one saw her again. Several gigantic billows buffeted the ship. A porthole was staved in, a boat was smashed and an iron rail was twisted out of shape. It was presumed that no one was on deck. The black of night descended; the baby awoke and cried; Chloe moaned and buttressed herself with more pillows. The clouds overhead broke and a pallid moon peered occasionally through the interstices.

Daisy Storey Leigh's enthusiasm for the storm and her delight in finding that it was a stimulant to her own vitiated strength had led her to be reckless. She had been a little bit reckless all her life. Somewhere, sometime, in the wind-blown darkness, one of the great waves that smote the ship had carried her into the sea.

Chloe did not discover it until morning. She knocked on the cabin door and Daisy did not answer. Again she knocked and finally she called petulantly. When there was no reply, she summoned a steward and requested a key for the door.

"I think she has fainted. She has been sickly for the last year." There was no one inside the cabin. Chloe stormed through the boat searching for Daisy.

"Imagine her leaving her cabin in the morning without paying any attention to her child. I expected that the duties of motherhood would soon be too onerous for her--especially when she was no longer under the eye of her husband."

After a time Chloe became apprehensive. The ship's officers were enlisted in the search. There was no Daisy Storey Leigh on the ship. Her maid checked her clothes and found the dress, the hat, the mackintosh, the shoes, and stockings that were missing. A white-faced passenger told of seeing her standing by the rail near the forward bulwark with the water rising close to her feet and the spray dashing against her. It was necessary to remind no one of the series of monumental seas which had been encountered shortly after the time Daisy had been seen there. By noon the verdict was certain. A beautiful woman, a happy mother, a valiant wife and a great singer had been lost forever. Surviving her was a baby that wept inarticulately and its aunt who was faced with the first real crisis of her life.

Chloe sat in her cabin, stiff with steel and whalebone, her face lax and pasty. For hours her mind was numb and blank. Currents of thoughts moved in it but vaguely. She was frightened by her responsibility. She was terrified at the thought of what Jonathan Leigh would do and feel when he learned that his wife was dead. Somewhere inwardly, however, she was almost glad. Daisy Storey was gone. Her brother would belong to her again. The blight till the names of Laforge and Leigh had been obliterated except--and each time she thought of the exception, Chloe turned her head toward the cradle where the baby slept--except for Muriel. Daisy Storey had not gone out of the world before she left a permanent, human memento of herself. A baby who would be a child and then a woman; a baby who would carry on beneath the roof in Rittenhouse Square the memory, the presence and the awful indignity of her mother.

Although she did not know it, Chloe's hatred was transferred in those hours from the mother to the child. She realized instinctively all the devotion her brother had given his wife would now belong to little Muriel. There would never be a return to the time when she, Chloe, was the confidante and tyrant of Jonathan Leigh. Gradually Chloe realized that the death of Daisy Storey would not retrieve her lost position and the first unpronounced feelings of gladness became a new grievance.

Chloe's duty was clear. She should arrange for the ship's doctor to care for the child for the remaining twenty-four hours at sea. She should hire the best nurses and doctors for it in France; she should book passage back to the United States at the earliest possible moment. As soon as she reached Havre she should cable Jonathan of his great loss. She should bring Muriel back to him. Sitting in the cabin of the ship, Chloe felt that to do all those things for a child whom she considered an intruder would turn her blood to vinegar.

Chloe put the first elements of her duties into effect: she cabled the tragic news to her brother. She found that almost a week would elapse before she could obtain suitable accommodations for the return trip to America. She took the baby to Paris, ensconced herself in a hotel and hired suitable nursing and medical attendants. What she did afterward was the product of slow germination in her mind and fortuitous circumstance.

Time hung somewhat heavily on her hands and she used it to investigate the French lineage of the Laforge family. In the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Laforge had been a mighty name. The enmity of some of the Louis' had damaged its prestige. After the Revolution it crumbled rapidly. Only in America did a wealthy and proud branch persevere.

Chloe visited châteaux that had belonged to her ancestors and she read painfully through innumerable books and genealogical documents. She also railed upon some of the more presentable descendants of the family, who still bore her name. It was in the course of one such call that she learned a fact which stimulated her benumbed faculties.

At about the time of the birth of Daisy Storey's child there had been born to a distant cousin a girl baby. The parents of the child had been killed in an accident a few months after its birth and the baby was in an orphan asylum.

Long after she had returned to America, Chloe believed she had conceived her plan first and that her search through the history and personnel of the Laforge family had been teleological. Such may have been the case. In any event, a few days before her return sailing, Chloe found herself driving through the streets of Paris with an amazing proposition taking root in her mind.

The proposition was founded upon her bitter hatred for Daisy Storey and the low-born baby who would represent her in the future. It consisted simply in extricating the French infant from the orphanage, carrying it back to America as Daisy Storey's child and turning the real Leigh heiress over to some American philanthropic institution for adoption. The substitution would insure the inheritance of the name and fortune of the Leighs and Laorges by a human being who sprang from the original stock and whose blood was not tainted by English peasantry.

Chloe pondered the scheme for forty-eight hours. The more she thought of it the more enamored she became of it. It represented a subtle revenge for her brother's foolish marriage. It represented an equally subtle reillumination of her ancestral line.

She found the courage to visit the asylum. The French baby resembled the American infant sufficiently to attempt the substitution. In the ferment of her perverse passions she found the courage for the occasion. She used her ample funds to pave the way. When she sailed back

to America she transported as Muriel Leigh the tiny French orphan. Jonathan Leigh's daughter traveled in the steerage on the same ship with a French peasant woman.

Chloe was met by her brother in New York City. It seemed to her that he had aged decades since their parting. He took the baby reverently in his arms, kissed it and carried it to a victoria. They drove to the station. He scarcely spoke until they were in a compartment together on the train. Then he said,

"Tell me about it."

Chloe concealed her nervousness. "There is nothing to tell."

"What she said--how she--died, by what inconceivable negligence the tragedy was permitted to happen."

"She was just reckless," Chloe said. "There was a storm and she insisted on being out in it. It must have washed her overboard. That's all."

Leigh looked at his sister with aching eyes and shook his head. He could not miss the hardness of her face. He could not help realizing that although his beloved Daisy Storey was gone, Chloe's heart was still adamant against her. His eyes traveled to the child.

"The baby has been well?"

Chloe stared out of the window of the train. "Perfectly."

"Thank God for that." Leigh spoke again after a pause. "We will bring her up. You and I, Chloe. We will make as fine a woman of her as her mother was. It is something to have this child." He stared again at the baby.

Chloe sighed and smiled. If her brother had noticed any difference between the baby in the nurse's arms and the baby who had sailed away with his wife, he attributed it to lapse of time. He would suspect nothing. The traditions of two families and their heritage would be turned back into the original channels. Daisy Storey was avenged.

A single task remained to be performed. Chloe had once been interested in a foundling society in Philadelphia. At that time she had corresponded with a similar society in Buffalo. It was to Buffalo that the French peasant took Daisy Storey's child and in Buffalo a month after her return to America Chloe met the woman. They went together to the asylum and Chloe arranged for the adoption of the baby. A Mr. and Mrs. Jamison from Mayville, Ohio, had entered their name on the list for a girl. When they found that one suiting their requirements was available they hastened to Buffalo by train. Chloe met them and talked to them.

The Jamisons were simple, charming, small-town people. But Chloe assured herself only that they could give the child a decent home, that they were unlikely to inquire into the child's antecedents and that Mayville was sufficiently remote from Philadelphia so that by no accident could the paths of the Jamisons and the Leighs ever cross.

Having done what she considered was her duty by the child, she threw a sop to her conscience and agreed to remit an annual check to the foster parents.

"I feel," Chloe explained to them, "a sort of personal interest in this child, inasmuch as it was a case brought to my attention by friends. I am not at liberty to make any statement about its parentage except to say it came from a good, ordinary, working family."

Mr. and Mrs. Jamison, awed by Chloe's hauteur, expressed only their gratitude. They took the baby lovingly and returned with it to Mayville, Ohio.

Chloe went back to Philadelphia and her brother's house where an intruder was slowly growing into the Leigh magnificence and the Leigh heritage. She settled down to a life of small routines. She was satisfied. Many things that had rankled her soul had been compensated. She

had lived through a dramatic period and brought what to her was a logical culmination of it.

The years began to pass. The world changed and grew older. Wrinkles appeared on Chloe's face and her hair bleached a yellowish white. Jonathan Leigh grew gray at the temples. He became a silent and almost taciturn man. During all that time the child also grew older. A governess gave it its first instruction; then it was sent to a private school. The geographical aspects of Philadelphia altered steadily. Its society also changed, but more slowly. Time anaesthetized Chloe's fears until eventually they disappeared. It was to be twenty years later that a series of circumstances would arise which would make the substitution of a foreign infant for Daisy Storey's baby of tremendous interest to the whole nation and a matter of life and death itself to at least one individual. When the twenty years had elapsed they seemed to Chloe to have been very short years, indeed.

CHAPTER III

"His Grace, the Duke of Valak, Vice-Regent of Lower Sabria, Lord of Motvia," the butler said. His voice embellished the title and his eyes, which did not refer to the card he carried on a small salver, indicated by that negation that the name of the Duke was familiar.

Jonathan Leigh lifted his face from the morning fire that flickered moodily in the library grate and rose to greet his guest. The butler disappeared. Silence poured into the room from obscure and remote corners. The Duke, tall, indefinitely beyond middle age, smiling. Jonathan Leigh, taller still, seeming at once older and younger although his hair, his thick brows and his mustache were white, and smiling as if the expression were a mere hospitable reflection. He waved the Duke to a chair. The silence retreated before their voices.

"Good morning, Your Grace."

The Duke's eyes rested momentarily on the coat of arms above the fireplace. "Good morning to you. It is unfortunate that you Americans have discarded ancestral titles." He made a pause which Jonathan Leigh did not care to fill. "You know my errand."

"Yes." Leigh's long arm lifted a square envelope from a table. "Your letter is here."

The Duke nodded. "Quite so. And I trust that your willingness to see me today is an indication of your assent?"

Leigh smoothed his mustache against his upper lip. "I expect that it is."

"Splendid! The Prince will be in ecstasy!"

"So I imagine."

There was reserve in his voice. Valak leaned forward anxiously. "But surely you realize that the Prince's affection for your daughter is real, passionate, beautiful?"

"It's quite possible."

"Then what? Miss Muriel has shown her ardor for him publicly."

"As much," Leigh murmured, "as she shows ardor for anything. I wonder sometimes-but let it pass. I talked with Muriel last night. I spent the entire afternoon yesterday conferring with my sister--"

"Miss Laforge-Leigh is a magnificent woman, a woman of a type that is becoming increasingly rare in these days!"

Leigh nodded. "As you say, her type is becoming rare. Both Muriel and her aunt were insistent upon the marriage. Rupert has addressed himself to me--informally--on numerous

occasions. I have here also his letter saying that you would call to make the formal request." He rose, walked over to one of the lofty windows that looked out on Rittenhouse Square and stared unseeing at its haughty elegance, dated but unabashed by the sea of modern sight and sound surrounding it. Presently he returned. "I give my consent to the marriage of Rupert of Sabria and my daughter Muriel."

The two men shook hands. Leigh pulled a bell cord and the butler appeared. "A bottle of that crested Sabria brandy, Severance." They drank a toast together. The book-lined walls seemed to add the pledge to their unspoken memories.

Valak ended the amenities of the ceremony after a proper interval. He sighed rapturously over the empty brandy glass and he sighed resignedly in preface. "I have one more duty, Leigh, my friend, that I must perform for His Highness. To perform it seems sacrilege at this time, yet I must. There is, of course, the matter of dowry--"

Leigh replaced the glass on the tray. The fingers that held it were as long and aristocratic as its stem. He gazed directly at the Duke whose eyes wavered. "I have, of course, made plans for Muriel's dowry."

"The Prince is not greedy. But I regret to say that, since the war, he has been pressed. Times have altered régimes and--"

"No apology, Valak. I suggest these arrangements. To the Prince and his bride, ten millions. Two millions more for Muriel to be held in trust for herself, under American law and not subject to any national or personal confiscation. My villa at Nice. The Donelle château in France. The London house. I have little use for them at my age. Muriel has, of course, a considerable fortune in her own right." Leigh hesitated. "Her mother's jewels--I prefer to will to her. For reasons of my own."

"Quite understandable."

Leigh ignored him and recited as if from memory. "There is the yacht. I never cared for the sea after Muriel's mother was--was lost. I gave the *Argo* to my sister who will present it to the Prince on the wedding day. Of course, upon my sister's decease, the entire Laforge and Leigh estates will be the property of Muriel, the last direct descendant of both families."

The Duke stood up. There were genuine tears in his eyes. "It is handsome, my friend, handsome," he said. Then he turned away. Leigh stared at his back without hostility and yet without friendliness. Even in this dramatic hour his reserve was unshaken.

Valak controlled his emotions. He expressed his satisfaction and thanks. He suggested and poured the liqueur for another toast. Then he began to discuss the wedding.

"Of course," he said, "the newspapers will make much of it. Your American newspapers are so enterprising. And sometimes so astoundingly candid. It will be what you call a front page event."

Leigh interrupted him. "I never have been interested in publicity."

"My friend, you have been its unfortunate victim. Those things one cannot forget."

Only the closest scrutiny would have revealed the change in Leigh. His fingers stopped their movement across his mustache. His eyes held a sudden illumination. But his voice was cold. "You refer, I presume, to my wife?"

"Exactly," Valak answered. "After twenty years, you most often feel a regret for--youth."

The coldness in Leigh's voice became metallic. "I am quite aware of the direction of your words. You mentioned the press because you realize that what is for me an old wound will be opened." The suave and European grace of his manner slipped from him. He spoke with bare, clipped words. "He became," the Duke said afterwards to the Prince, "purely American."

Dangerously American."

Leigh was standing then. "The Leighs, as you have probably been at some pains to discover, are members of one of the oldest American families. They are of royal and noble stock. They governed Pennsylvania when this city of Philadelphia was an Indian village. They had titles. The Laforges came from Virginia, and France before that. We were proud and great. We prospered. We married well. And my sister and I were last in line. She never married."

His eyes were fiery as he continued. "When I was a young man at Oxford, and long before she was famous, I heard Daisy Storey sing at a cheap music hall. I met her and I fell in love with her. She was wonderful. She had nobility greater than a name could give. She braved her way through the dross and won fame. I am honored to this day to say that she remembered the proud and foolish Oxford boy. I loved her, I say, as few men can love. I won her. I married her square in the teeth of conventions and traditions and publicity. She never gave me cause to regret it. We lived in Eden. Muriel was born. Our Eden became Paradise.

"Business complications, my wife's illness--everything came at once. A doctor in Germany, they said, could save her. Daisy would not leave the baby. I could not go abroad. My sister went with them."

"Please--" the Duke murmured.

Leigh waved his hand. "I have not finished. On her way to Germany to be cured Daisy, my Daisy--was swept overboard in a gale. Miss Laforge-Leigh brought little Muriel back in due time. But my life ended the night I received the cable from France telling of the--the tragedy." He contemplated Valak silently. When he spoke again his vehemence had been sheathed. "You see, your Grace, when you refer to my youth as regrettable, you speak of something you do not know and cannot understand.

"They called Daisy the 'Opera-house Queen.' The newspapers will remember all that. I am impervious to it. I honor her, as you must, as Rupert must, as I have tried to make Muriel honor her. Low birth made her soar higher than the highest born. Muriel is not like her mother. I do not think she is like me. My sister has been in charge of her upbringing. She is the only being left to me, this daughter, and I have done for her everything that I can."

"You have been magnanimous, sir."

Leigh bowed his head in his hands and sat impassive with the chaotic dreams to which his words had given rise. Finally he rang for Severance.

"Tell the ladies we will join them whenever they wish." When he rose with his guest, he seemed twice his age.

In physical composition Muriel vaguely resembled her father. She was tall and thin, with a long face, and aquiline nose, and dark hair and eyes. Despite a certain angularity, however, her motions were sinuous and supple. She preferred clothes of a smart austerity that fitted close to her body. Her already pale cheeks she powdered still paler until they appeared to be transparent. In vivid contrast were her lips, drawn sharply with crimson. Her voice had a voluptuous contralto resonance.

She was, perhaps, the logical product of training by her steel-willed, Victorian aunt who believed that life was a battle campaign between men and women, who could be shocked only by those matters which leaked out into public view, who would compromise ethics only when social ends justified compromise, and who hyphenated Laforge to her name of Leigh to give it double luster.

Aunt Chloe Laforge-Leigh had seen to it that Muriel was christened by the most fashionable clergyman, educated in the most fashionable school for young ladies, chaperoned

annually to the smartest resorts in Europe, introduced to selected classic literature, tutored in the genealogy and history of royal families, invited to the most exclusive houses, given a lavish debut at the Bellevue-Stratford, depicted in the proper costume each season in Philadelphia and even New York Sunday rotogravures, warned against the evil purposes of most men, armed with an eagle eye for the proper husband when he should appear, furnished with a blanket attitude of snobbery for the world at large, taught to regret that Daisy Storey was her mother, and finally, supplied with Prince Rupert who would remove the responsibility of Muriel from her shoulders.

Aunt Chloe had done all that with an undying hatred for her brother's wife burning in her heart. Believing it was necessary to fight for everything in life, she made a continual struggle in behalf of her niece. Her strident tongue was never silent in the old mansion. Her broad bosom, her heavy chin, her toppling heap of gray hair swept the world ahead. Yet all that was for her family and to the world she lifted saccharine eyes and agreeable words, putting in a syllable beneficial to the name of Leigh (and more often to Laforge, since her brother's foolish marriage) with a deferential blush.

To Muriel she had consecrated her life, and in Muriel was vested much of what she had taught. Beyond that, in the realms Aunt Chloe could not probe, was the hard sophistication Muriel herself had gathered first from sessions of late whispering at school and later from house-parties and dances and tête-à-têtes which her aunt permitted when she was at last forced to admit that outrageous fashion had made the chaperon obsolete.

Muriel knew more about life than her aunt had ever guessed. Many of the things she knew as facts were not pleasant. She was not a happy girl. Womanhood made her no happier. Yet none would have said that she was unhappy. Her personality was not designed to set up speculation about her emotions. She took her world at its face value and she ruled it. As much as she desired of it was hers. If she disliked any part of it--that was unfortunate for what she disliked, but not for her.

Until she was sixteen she obeyed her aunt at least superficially. Afterward she seldom paid any attention to the long harangue about life, marriage and caste. Aunt Chloe never talked about love, not because she was a spinster, but because she felt it was beneath either a Laforge or a Leigh. It had, she said, ruined Jonathan. Of such things Muriel was and was made. If she had not learned to be a friend, she understood the weapons of an enemy. If she lacked ideals, she had a certain wisdom.

When her aunt captured Prince Rupert for a weekend, Muriel accepted his love-making as a matter of course. He had made violent love to her in the back of a Rolls-Royce, in a garden and in a speed boat before she realized that he was amusing when not too ardent. She decided forthwith to marry him. He was a Prince. He was quite handsome. And he was clever. It was more than most girls of her class could expect. Perhaps she even loved him a little. She had been instructed to marry a Baron or a Duke or a Prince; he had been sent by indigent parents to America to wed the most presentable heiress. Both might consider themselves fortunate.

Aunt Chloe was well embarked upon a discussion in which she took both sides and to which Muriel gave only the attention required to know when it was ended.

"I suppose I could have been a trifle more tactful with your father, but why should I? He is my brother--sometimes I think, unfortunately. He's weak. The Leighs have traces of weakness. I'm glad I derive wholly from the Laorges. I merely interrupted his after-lunch port to say that I had decided you were to marry Rupert. He wanted to know if you loved each other. It's his unfortunate past that crops up in such cases and make him sentimental. Of course, I said of course. He said that the Prince seemed like a decent chap. Imagine that. Decent--about a Prince.

Of course, your father has become hopelessly provincial in these last few years. There was always a touch of the colonist in the Leighs. And living in Philadelphia and Devon and Palm Beach exclusively increases it. I set a price--"

"What was it?" Muriel asked with a faint show of interest.

"Ten millions and something set aside for you. The estate can afford it. In fact, it leaves the estate fairly intact. And it will all come to you when I go yonder--"

"Oh, you'll live forever, aunty. I'm sure of it."

The older woman glanced at her niece with pursed lips and then chose to disregard the words. Muriel began to turn the pages of a magazine.

"He said he'd think it over, but I would really like to see him try to deny us this triumph of your career. The angels in heaven alone know how I've thought and planned and fought to bring this about. And with what a handicap! Your mother must be classed as a handicap, you know. I have frequently wondered--"

Severance stood imperturbable at the door. "The Duke of Valak and Mr. Leigh have finished their conversation."

Aunt Chloe stopped talking abruptly. She turned her chair a little so that it faced the door. "Bring them, Severance," she said.

The Duke came forward first. "My dear Miss Laforge-Leigh! And Princess Muriel!"

Miss Laforge-Leigh gasped audibly, screwed up her face in concentration and then realized the significance of the words. "Am I to understand that there is to be a consummation of this--this brilliant little couple of ours?"

"Quite so, Miss Laforge-Leigh." The Duke kissed the two feminine hands and began to talk to Miss Laforge-Leigh.

Leigh himself had followed quietly into the room. His attention was absorbed in his daughter. When they had entered, she had closed a magazine that she held. With the salutation of "Princess" she half-stood; for an instant her face had awakened. Immediately, however, she seated herself again and surveyed the room and its occupants through the unmoved mask of her face. Leigh could not determine her emotions. Certainly the granting of her permission had shaken her calm for a fraction of a second. Veiled self-congratulation continued to flow between Miss Laforge-Leigh and the Prince's emissary. Leigh crossed to his daughter.

For an instant he paused and then, timidly, he patted her head. "I hope it makes you happy, dear."

"I hope it makes you happy," she answered.

He lifted his hand quickly. He felt a momentary bitterness. "It's not my happiness that matters at this time. It's yours."

Miss Laforge-Leigh's vigilance caught the words. She turned from Valak. "Jonathan! I feel that your perverted sense of connubial adequacy is entirely out of place at this moment!"

It was a stinging reproach, more virulent because she tried to make it sound playful, to make it a jesting excuse for what she pretended was a peccadillo in his character. Leigh did not writhe. He made no reply. He was conscious of a space in which all eyes were on him: his sister's defiant, the Duke's worried, Muriel's cryptic.

"I think I'll excuse myself," he said finally. "I find that I am somewhat fatigued."

Again in his library he summoned Severance. "Don't let anybody in here. And have my luncheon sent up."

He walked to the window and drew back the curtain. Round his library were portraits of other Leighs who had stood in that embrasure and stared out over Rittenhouse Square. Tall,

broad-shouldered men with the Leigh nose and chin. Stern, noble, celebrated--men who had sat in the first Continental Congress in Carpenters' Hall, who had officered the barefoot, skin-clad heroes who won the independence of the colonies, earlier men who had ruled dominions under the English kings, later men who had continued the progress of the western world from an eminence of Philadelphia aristocracy--bankers, statesmen, friends of the great, fashionable, brilliant, eloquent.

He could never think of himself without the unconscious prelude of that ancestry. The weight of it was greater because he and his sister bore it all. After them, after Muriel, there would be nothing. The name would be obliterated by a foreign title. The estates would be dissipated in other countries. There would be no more rumor of the Leighs along Market or Broad or Chestnut. The proud pomp would vanish from the ugly, elaborate buildings of his city.

If he had a son, Daisy Storey Leigh might have given him a son except for the cruel fangs of a mighty wave. Some men would have grieved the allotted time and found another wife. But Leigh could never consider that. Daisy had been his life. Without her, he was without life enough even to make an outward gesture of marriage.

His mind shifted slowly to Muriel. An unfathomable girl, one who had never been a child and now, grown old enough, was something different from a woman as he understood women. Chivalry would not permit him to think of her as hard, even if fealty would. But strangeness pervaded her. Certainly she was unlike most of the Leighs. And she was unlike her mother, although no one could say what Daisy Storey's stock had been for more than a generation. In some ways she resembled Chloe Laforge-Leigh, and that was natural because Chloe had been responsible for her.

While he was unwilling to admit it, Leigh was nevertheless aware of his sister's attitude toward him. She had made it clear on the day she came back from Europe with the motherless child. Through two decades she had daily emphasized it. At first he had been grateful to his sister when she offered to live in his home and care for the demanding bundle of humanity on which his very soul had hung. But when the child grew away from him, Leigh sometimes doubted his wisdom. He had been good to Muriel. He supposed that he had spoiled her, when discipline failed. But when she was five or six, he felt that she was growing away from him. He even guessed that his sister assisted in the process.

He could do nothing. The child developed personality. Three separate lives were lived in the dim and lofty rooms of the house on Rittenhouse Square. Three lives of three people who could reach each other day or night by lifting their voices and who, in spite of that, had never spoken honestly to each other.

Leigh stirred the curtain with an unhappy impatience. He had made every human effort possible to reconcile his family. When that had failed he had taken refuge in the tenets of his kind and his tradition. Perhaps his sister, also, felt such moments of frustration and grieved because of them. Those things he saw sadly. But he was not lax enough to stoop to self-pity. Ascetic, stern, the early turbulence of the American Empire quenched in him to a dull ember, he knew only that fact of failure and a partially-slaked desire to have done in his life more shining and defiant deeds than he could number.

The Moore house across the Square was shuttered. The Moores were living permanently abroad. The Kinnersleys had auctioned their place. Elsie alone survived the line. His own family was like that. An urge to do something definite itched in his veins. He could not spend his remaining years in retrospect and *weltschmerz* at a bay window.

CHAPTER IV

Leigh went to his broad desk, unscrewed a fountain pen, took a sheet of paper and began to write. Several sheets followed, which he crumpled in turn. Finally he was satisfied. Opening a drawer, he lifted out a French telephone. Some inner prejudice or some sense of the inharmonious of machinery in his library had decided him to conceal the instrument. He called a number and asked for Mr. Avery.

"Hello, Avery? Jonathan Leigh talking. I wondered if you would be good enough to drop in here this morning? What? One o'clock? Well, I'll have Severance bring a tray to the library here for you. Some chutney? I wouldn't forget. I suppose you'll see it in the papers in a few hours, but I might as well prepare you. I've agreed to the marriage of Muriel and Rupert. Yes. I think so. Well--" He hung up and fell into a long interval of thoughtfulness.

Rupert's full title was Rupert Omazzy Romanoff Sebastian, Crown Prince of Sabria. He was heir to a waning and war-enfeebled kingdom. His mother was dead. His father was practically a cripple. His future subjects were of mixed races and for hundreds of years they had fought among themselves.

For a long period Valak had been a sort of anonymous dictator of Sabria. He lived at the palace in the capital city and it was to him rather than to the king that the nobles and powerful commoners went for decisions. Valak belonged to an old line whose prototypes survived here and there in Europe in the present century. He had been taught that Sabria was his first and only love. His training had been accomplished in court circles in the late nineteenth century and the breath of his existence was intrigue. He was shrewd, sophisticated and proud. He was, moreover, totally unscrupulous. He considered himself by virtue of his position and training an adequate arbiter of all the problems of ordinary man.

When he realized that the struggling population of Sabria could no longer be expected to support a royal family and its entourage, he looked, as other men in similar predicaments have looked, toward America. He persuaded the king that the solution, not only for the royal line but for the country itself, lay in a marriage of his son to some inordinately rich woman. Reluctantly and after much debate the king agreed.

Young Rupert, returned recently from an English school, was more difficult to win over than his father.

"Why don't we," he said to Valak, "just let the bally country go native? The people are miserable; they have been exploited for years by corporations from other countries, and to let them declare a republic and set up their own government would be fair enough."

When Valak said, "What would you do then?" the Prince merely grinned and answered, "Get a better job than the one I have." Valak settled down to his campaign.

"You can't quit. It is up to you somehow or other to bring back to Sabria enough money to rehabilitate it. Money is power. The people can be educated; they can be helped from their misery; they can develop their own natural resources and take the profit due them from those resources. If you had courage, if you had any respect for your traditions, if you were one-half the man your father and grandfathers for generations have been before you, you would seize this opportunity to save millions of people and a beautiful country from ruin."

Night and day Valak talked to the Prince. In the end he prevailed. Rupert agreed even more reluctantly than the king that he would go to America in search of his and his country's

fortune. The departure was preceded by an anarchistic outbreak more violent than any before it. One wing of the castle was bombed, and although no one was killed the explosion served as a graphic warning.

Valak bade good-bye to the king regretfully. He was not sure that the old man would be alive to greet his return, and the king was burdened with worries--the latest of them apprehension about Valak himself.

"I understand you caught the anarchists?"

"I did."

"And executed them?"

"I did."

"Without trial?"

Valak nodded. "Without trial."

"Valak--Valak," the king said. "You have gone too far. Savagely, relentlessly, without recourse to justice, without regard for human life--"

"In a higher cause," Valak said.

The king sighed. "Take good care of Rupert."

The Duke made the formal gestures of obeisance and withdrew. He sailed soon afterward, keeping his own counsel.

Sometime later he and the Prince and their party arrived in New York with the proper fanfare and after a careful publicity campaign, Rupert and Valak began to meet Americans. Valak met, for the most part, society dowagers who had a clear notion of his errand and some training in Europe in the nineties in the sort of procedure expected of them. But Rupert met American youth. Young women like Muriel--young men like Barney, the son of Douglas Avery. Because he was young and could learn easily and because his instincts were good, Rupert profited from these American encounters, which supplemented those he had made in school in England. And it is possible that from his new friends in the western country he derived more inspiration for improving his own country and a clearer sense of his duty to his people than he had from all the incessant, platitudinous harangue of Valak.

It was of Rupert, of Valak that Leigh was dreaming when Douglas Avery came into the library without being announced--the privilege of a few friends in the Leigh household. He was stout, red-cheeked and almost bald. Avery and Avery had represented the finest of Philadelphia families since the time of Franklin. One hundred and seventy-five years of unbroken practice, always with two Averys in the firm except during the 1860's (as distinguished from the 1760's) when there had been a father, a son and a grandson for six years. This age-old heritage sat not too heavily on the shoulders of Douglas Avery. Two years before he had lost the patronage of Mrs. August Perry because she learned that he played golf. Nevertheless he was skillful, ingenious, and adroit as the Averys had always been and no man living knew more of Philadelphia's people and history, no record on earth was a more complete file of human nobleness and vanity than his brief-crammed safe.

He ignored the after-trace of melancholy on Leigh's face. "So you've agreed on the marriage, Jonathan? I knew you would."

"You are better acquainted with me, then, than I am with myself."

"Quite possibly I am." He chuckled and sat down in a leather upholstered chair. "I owe my intelligence to my son, however."

"To young Barney?"

Avery nodded. "He saw Muriel the other night at some one of these modern variations of

the cotillion. She told him she had decided on Rupert. Told him to get the legal paper ready for the nuptials--I believe I quote her."

Leigh frowned. "Muriel doesn't seem to me to be--"

"Be what? Normal? Obedient? Ladylike? I assure you, from what Barney tells me, she is quite in--a--vogue."

"Vogue. Oh--yes."

Avery leaned forward sympathetically. "I know how you feel, Jonathan. Thank heaven the Averys don't run to daughters! When Muriel and Rupert began to appear together in the papers, I naturally looked up a little more than his genealogy. He seems to be quite an intelligent lad. Half English and half Sabrian. Doesn't even seem to want the throne. Invited Barney to a stag dinner the other evening and Barney's enthusiastic. Of course, Barney's fresh from Harvard, but I believe he has enough sense to distinguish a gentleman."

Leigh smiled. "I always thought he had a great deal of sense. I'm fond of him."

The lawyer shook his head. "Sometimes I think so. Sometimes I do not. Today, for example, I do not."

"No?"

"Not today. He came into my office with the proposition of going into corporation law. Avery and Avery in commercial law! Archibald Avery and Pater and Jefferson and all the others would return from the dead to protest. But worse than that, he wanted me to rent a suite in the skyscraper they're putting up on Walnut Street and furnish it with this so-called modern furniture. Have you seen the stuff, Jonathan? "

"I can't say that I have."

"There's some over at Wanamaker's. Go over to see it. It's more exciting than the zoo." Avery began to laugh reminiscently. Mirthful tears filled his eyes. He wiped his gold-rimmed spectacles with a silk handkerchief. "Yes, Jonathan, I'm glad I haven't a daughter. A son is enough."

Leigh's melancholy had evaporated which, perhaps, was the result of a quick diagnosis and a subtle treatment by Avery.

"Well," Leigh said, "will we have business and then luncheon--or vice versa?" "The business. I'd like to eat Rene's food with a clear conscience."

Leigh folded the last sheet he had written so that only the blank space at the bottom was visible. Then, lighting a candle, he sealed down the corners. "I have made a new will," he said, "and that is the first thing I want you to take care of for me. I'm arranging a dowry for Muriel--I've made a note of the details and the securities. Also the deeds. You, of course, will see to that. You will deal, I presume, with Valak." He began to enumerate the steps to be taken. Some time later he rang for Severance and the two men lunched together. Avery in delight over his food, Leigh wrapped in an abstraction broken only when a horse and wagon clattered over the hard pavement in front of his house, breaking the smooth hum of automobile traffic. Then, for an instant, memories rose to the surface and he stared at the window. Avery pretended not to follow his thoughts.

It was half past three in the afternoon. The Leigh mansion, set side by side with its venerable fellows, had taken on an appearance of vitality that surged through its subdued interior and spread out along the sidewalk, into the street and through the square. Two delivery wagons, shiny black enamel sitting above their rectangular nest of batteries, were drawn up at the side entrance. A young man from one of the newspapers was lounging along the pavement, scanning house numbers. Barney Avery passed him with quick steps

and sounded the bell. In the hall Muriel, her hat and coat on, let him through the door.

She said, "Hello."

"Hello, Muriel. Trying out for first floor maid?"

"I'm waiting for Rupert. He's late."

Barney grinned. His grin was bland and cheerful. It burst out from beneath his blue eyes, his broad brow, his thickly curled and almost black hair—a thing at once within him and apart from him. "The press," he answered. "He's probably writing a feature article." At the sound of the bell Barney peered through the narrow window that flanked the door. "Here's one now. And you can get a contract, too. A little story on what it feels like to be a princess would be helpful. Carrying democracy to--"

Muriel frowned and he opened the door. The reporter entered. He ignored Barney. "Miss Leigh, I presume?" he said to the girl. "I wonder if you can spare a few moments? I came here from the *Sun* to cover the Daisy Storey angle of your engagement."

She looked scornfully at the reporter. "Did you? Well, do you mind going to the devil for me?"

Barney interceded. "Just a minute, fellow. Don't make a mistake. I'm one of the Leighs' lawyers. I could tell you something." He led the indignant reporter toward the drawing room. "See you later, Muriel. That sounds like Rupert's ring now." And to the reporter, "Sit down, fellow. You look like a man who knows a story when he sees one--and the *Sun* is a paper that wants the truth. Sooner or later some editor is going to see that the real Daisy Storey write-up is not scandal but romance. That ought to make a good angle for you. Jonathan Leigh, you should say, didn't marry a singer who was beneath him--he married a fine woman whom he loved. That's more in keeping with what the public wants these days, anyhow."

He continued to talk earnestly and finally dispatched the reporter with a story which, when printed, afforded Jonathan Leigh one bright hour of solace in the days that followed. Shortly afterward he was admitted to the library.

Leigh shook his hand. "Glad to see you, Barney."

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Leigh." He opened a brief-case. "Here are the papers you wanted. Father thought you might like to have them copied--"

"I think not, thank you. I prefer to keep them in my safe here."

"That's all right." Barney took a package of cigarettes from his pocket, lifted his eyebrows questioningly, and lit one after the assenting response of the older man. "Is there anything else you want us to do, Mr. Leigh?"

"Nothing else, Barney."

"Then I'd better get back to the office." He rose.

Leigh stopped him at the door. "Oh--Barney. Your father told me that you occasionally see Muriel."

"I do. Often. We barge into each other in the social whirl."

"Tell me--do you--speaking as one of her generation--do you think she is happy?"

"Happy?"

Leigh considered how to express his thoughts. "I mean--is she content with her life, her prospects of this marriage?"

"Why--I guess so."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Our whole generation is discontented, Mr. Leigh. Perhaps we are a little bit cynical. We realize that life isn't perfect. We take what we think is best."

"Then"--there was a long pause--"you don't think she loves him?"

Barney, in his turn, pondered a reply. "I think--that some of us don't even believe in love." He looked squarely into the eyes of the older man. "I might add that I think some people in your generation also didn't believe in love. For different reasons, perhaps, Mr. Leigh. But the result is the same."

The older man knew that Barney was thinking of Chloe Laforge-Leigh. He sighed gently. "Well--those who make decisions like that--"

"--can best regulate their own behavior," Barney finished.

Leigh held out his hand. "That is what I was thinking. Well, Barney, thank you for coming up. It wasn't necessary, but I appreciate it. Good-bye."

Barney walked back to the law office slowly. The developments in the Leigh family had accidentally revealed a facet of Jonathan Leigh's character that he had not suspected. It had never seemed to him that a person so taciturn and aloof could have the ability either to wonder or to worry. Throughout his youth the name of Leigh stood not only for financial power and social preeminence but also for those almost unhuman qualities of unemotion supposed to be the attributes of the elect. The Leighs were not people. They were names on charity bazaar programs, names in Riviera and Palm Beach guest lists, rotogravure pictures of Muriel with an ostrich plume in her hair just before her presentation to the King and Queen of Great Britain. Jonathan in a top hat standing outside a box at the Belmore Horse Show, or Aunt Chloe flatteringly depicted by the latest fashionable portrait painter. The Leighs were his father's most influential clients. The Leighs were not the gods of Philadelphia society: they were Philadelphia.

Barney's own excellent family aspired to no more than the legal account of the Leighs and the dignified friendship of the head of the house, a friendship garnished with the superficial stuff of intimacy but actually remote in feeling. Jonathan Leigh had always treated him with a kindly tolerance. Muriel had used him as her personal property on those few occasions when he could be of any service whatever. Chloe had ignored him--but Chloe also ignored his father. Barney remembered that once, when his father had insisted that Chloe Laforge-Leigh declare all her Paris purchases for customs duty, she had said, "After all, there is no fundamental difference between lawyers and tradespeople--is there?" Thus he had thought of the Leighs.

Then, on this very afternoon, Jonathan had been shaken from fifty years of reticence to ask him, Barney, a delicate question concerning his daughter. Barney had answered it as he would any question--quickly and with his best reasons first. He had intimated what he really believed--that Chloe was responsible for Muriel and what Muriel had become. Leigh had not objected to that. For an instant, as he stood at the door of his father's office, Barney wondered why the older man had asked, why he had not objected to what might be construed as impertinence and why he had dismissed him with so friendly a smile. He had always taken his understanding of the house of Leigh for granted. History and tradition had resolved such magnificence into a pattern. Now Barney was puzzled.

Later in that same afternoon Rupert and his bride-to-be had tea together at the Ritz. Because they chose a table in a far corner none of Muriel's friends intruded on them save by curious glances and inaudible tongues--a barrage against which both she and the Prince had trained defenses.

The Prince was not much taller than Muriel. He was dark and slight. His gaze was direct, in variance with the usual flickering of brown Mediterranean irises. He spoke with a slight English accent but there was no trace of foreignness intermingled with that. His conversation was punctuated with quickly flashing smiles which had nothing in them of the slow Nordic grin.

He wore American clothes, but no one would have taken him for an American. He was a contradiction of first impressions.

"Your friends," he said when he had ordered tea, "rallied around this afternoon in no time at all."

"To see a Prince--"

"Who wore nothing but a sack suit and was already engaged."

"Did it bore you?"

"Not at all," he answered. "Americans can be more formal when they are informal than any people on earth. In France, say, we would have had an announcement of the betrothal first. Very formal. Then these snug little parties afterward would be unreserved. In Sabria, anyhow, it would be that way. By the time you and I reach the announcement stage, everyone will have read about it in the papers. Even in Chillicothe." He laughed. "Chillicothe. We will name a town in Sabria Chillicothe. But it is an old joke?"

Muriel nodded. "Funny American names? I believe it is. I'll have father's secretary make a list of them for you. There is one called Hoboken--and Weehawken--Walla-Walla--Sheboygan--" She smiled. "It's too bad I've never seen Sabria. I can imagine it would give me a comeback. Something with a lot of 'chzs' in it."

They paused while the waiter set the tea things on the table. Then the Prince chuckled again. "Valak was annoyed at your father this morning."

"Not unusual," Muriel said. "How much sugar do you take? I might as well learn now."

"Three. Yes, indeed. Valak was what I might call on his ear."

"That's vulgar, Rupert."

"Vulgar, perhaps, but quite accurate. Explicit. It defines Valak. He described your father--in Sabrian, of course--as an elephant trying to see the world through a keyhole."

"Is that a proverb?"

"It might very well be. But it isn't. It merely meant that Valak was hard pushed to give vent to his emotions. He said that your father ticked off the items of your dowry as coldly as if he had been counting a golf score."

"Father isn't very emotional about money--or anything else."

The Prince was thoughtful for a moment. Presently he said, "Do you think I am marrying you for your fortune?"

"Would you marry me if I had none?" He frowned. "That's very romantic--but it doesn't mean a thing. Let's be serious." She looked up at him. "Are you falling in love with me, Rupert?"

"You are very fascinating."

"Will you be faithful to me?"

He shrugged. "You tease well."

"You consider it a feminine art to be practiced in gentlewomen's boarding schools?"

"Why not? It's more important than domestic science."

"Are you positive?"

"I am. It is an integral part of love."

Muriel shook her head. "Then it's not important. I gather from what I see that science--any kind of science--and business are the important things for most people. One is taught how to change a tire on an automobile and how to read the stock market reports long before it is even hinted that there is another way of kissing besides the facial punch. The dab. For people like me, it is more important to be able to guess within a thousand dollars just what the bank account of a man is, or to be able to place his exact relationship to the Hohenzollerns or the Hapsburgs or

maybe even the Astors by his name--than it is to consider him as a male into whose arms I might some day consign my affections. You happen to be related to the Hapsburgs. And--"

"And I am fortunate enough to have affectionate arms--"

"Trained all over the continent."

"May I be permitted to say--applesauce!"

"Certainly. Let's get all our bluffs straight at the beginning. We'll know where we stand."

The Prince looked down at the table-cloth. There was a minute dissatisfaction on his face. The easy candor of the American girls whom he had met had impressed him at first. But Muriel's attitude seemed to be one either of defense or else of utter hardness. She was bowing to someone and he caught a glimpse of the straight, unsmiling mouth, the thin, level eye-brows, even while he felt his own face put on an expression of mild pleasure and his own head bend slightly.

He asked one more question. "What do you want most?"

"That was Mrs. Weatherbridge. She was itching to be invited here to meet you. Philadelphia sometimes reminds me of a corset stuffed with fussy dowagers. What do I want? I don't want anybody in the world to try to investigate my feelings. I have none. Excepting possibly anger."

For an instant Rupert believed that it was true. He raised his eyebrows. "Finished?" he asked.

In the evening Valak called at Rittenhouse Square to confer with Chloe Laforge-Leigh over arrangements. Half a dozen reporters, three of them from New York, were waiting downstairs for Mr. Leigh. The Prince had taken Muriel to the theater.

Miss Laforge-Leigh wore a large gray-green comb in her hair. She received the Duke in her private drawing room and sat behind a small Louis XV desk idly waving a fan while she talked. Evening clothes, even from the masterful hand of Patou, could neither diminish nor disguise her proportions.

"Did you see the evening papers, your Grace? 'Philadelphia's Royal Couple!' Sometimes these editors are rather effective. I talked to several of them--unofficially, of course, this afternoon. They importuned me."

Valak nodded. "The hotel was filled with them."

Miss Laforge-Leigh produced a leather-bound book. "Here is our guest list. I have checked the more important personages once and the most important twice. I thought you would care to run through it."

"Naturally. The Prince's party will be small. It will be necessary, of course, to repeat the wedding in Sabria."

"I assumed it would." She smiled. "There have been exceptions to that only in the case of Roland Perth of Upper Sabria and Prince Czeri during the past two centuries."

"Indeed?" Valak said. "I hadn't looked--"

"A conscientious study of the royal families is my dearest hobby. I could recite from memory the entire Sabrian line. Down to Counts, at the least."

Valak expressed casual surprise. "Most remarkable."

"As for Windsors, Hapsburgs, Bonapartes, Hohenzollerns, Bourbons--"

"Most remarkable. Speaking of the newspapers, they were rather shocking in the matter of--of Miss Muriel's--ah--mother."

Chloe was transiently cross. Then she accepted the interruption and became indignant over the new topic--all in the space of a second. "We were at once crushed and furious."

"I thought that possibly Mr. Leigh--with his resources--could do something to quiet these

journals."

She stretched out the fan. "My dear Duke! If you could know how I have begged him, how I have pleaded with him--to no avail. When it happened, twenty years ago, I suggested to him that he should buy outright every newspaper that mentioned this Storey girl's name in connection with him."

"But she was his wife--"

Chloe smiled complacently. "It would have meant buying all the newspapers published at the time. He laughed in my face."

Valak looked away from her. For him, Miss Laforge-Leigh's absurdities were more difficult to bear than the intricacies of her ethics. Valak was accustomed to invisible deviations from the path of absolute right. But in common with the rest of the world, he cordially despised Chloe in private. The single class which accepted and admitted her was composed of women like herself, of which Philadelphia society had ample numbers.

Valak was, scaled by small monarchies, a shrewd statesman. For many years his fingers had been on the pulse of the small South European countries. The very present dissolution of royalty was evident to him before the war. That a map-shorn and ragged Sabria had survived at all was due largely to him. Now, however, the end was in sight. The Queen was dead, the King an invalid. The Duke remained loyal in a measure to them. He seized upon the Prince, his personality and title, as the one single hope of saving a proud name and a faltering family from poverty-stricken extinction.

There had been years in his distant youth when he would not have spoken to such a person as Chloe Laforge-Leigh, when Jonathan himself could have been nothing more than a minor guest at court. There had been years when the idea of royal marriage to an American girl whose family titles had been abandoned long before a bourgeois, continental revolution would have made him smile with amusement. Now it was essential to be serious about it.

Prince Rupert had been willing to sacrifice himself, at least in all the superficial forms, to the exigencies of his line. A fanfare of publicity had heralded their arrival in America. New York had whirled them through its skyscrapers. In New York there had been directed toward Rupert the efforts of many dowagers, but the Prince, to the disgust of Valak, had turned down in rapid succession the silk-clad, cigarette-smoking, faintly alcohol-scented young ladies so avidly proffered to him. It was only in Philadelphia, after he had met Muriel, that he consented.

Valak understood the situation in the Leigh family at once. While the Prince associated with the daughter, he carefully manipulated her aunt in whose person he perceived the chief ingredients of decision.

Now and until the wedding was consummated, he was engaged in a campaign of mingled flattery and veiled toleration. That evening and many others he spent with her, listening to hours of oracular inanity and aiding her pettifogging, microscopic preoccupation with social minutiae.

"Oh, are the Wilksburys too nouveau? Then cross them off, by all means."

"Quite so, my dear Duke. And young Evelyn Minton is thinking of the stage--"

"Off, of course."

"What a fine sense of the fitting you have, dear Duke."

And on.

CHAPTER V

At twelve o'clock that night Barney Avery entered his house quietly and found his father sitting in his study regarding a dead cigar with ruminative eyes.

"Sit down, son. How does it happen you're in so early?"

"Getting to be office-broken, I guess. How come you're up so late?"

"Thinking, son. Thinking. I can remember when the world was a good deal different from the way it is now."

Barney took a chair, drew a single cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and said, "Meaning what?"

"The Leighs, I suppose. Poor old Jonathan!"

"A paradox most people might miss. What about him?"

Douglas Avery held out his hand for a match and puffed at the cigar. "Did it ever occur to you that he hasn't a person to cherish in the world? His sister is poison to him. His daughter doesn't care for him--or for anyone else. He's been as lonesome as Robinson Crusoe for twenty years. The world he lives in--or used to live in--considers it normal and just retribution. For what? For marrying a grand girl about whom he was crazy instead of some straight-haired Quaker whose ancestors ran into busts and legends. Does money do that to people?"

"Not always. A Chloe Laforge-Leigh would, though."

"Chloe's a fool!" Avery said passionately. "But even that doesn't explain everything. I remember when Muriel was a baby. Jonathan was devoted to her. It took years to estrange them. I think he still wants violently to be fond of his daughter."

"So do I." Barney repeated the conversation he had had with Jonathan Leigh. "He cares about her."

"He tries to, at least. Strange. Everything's strange. A rich and venerable family marries its daughter to a Prince. That is fairly ordinary--although the newspapers write about it as if such a thing had never happened before." He shook his head. "What do you think of the Prince? You've met him, haven't you?"

"Good egg."

"I suppose that's real praise. Well, get to bed, son. I'm going to sit here a while."

"Good night."

"Good night."

One o'clock. Jonathan Leigh was lying in bed staring through the darkness at the canopy above him. Occasionally he stirred restively, as if sleep were out of the question and he merely adjusted his weary body to its vigil. His forehead was seamed with concentration, the concentration that had kept his pride unbroken for long and destitute years.

Chloe creamed her face in front of a mirror, turning her bulky head from side to side in order to observe the effect of a battery of chance expressions.

Rupert and Muriel were sitting in a limousine parked beside the house in the Square. He held her in his arms and kissed her, oblivious to the chauffeur and the reverberating tread of a policeman. She leaned lightly against him, her face as pale as lotus, her lips placidly yielding.

Avery dropped his cigar stub into a tall receiver. "Too proud," he muttered to the shadows. He walked stiffly from the room, switching off the lights as he went. A servant in deshabelle followed to his bedroom and was dismissed with a smile and a shake of the head.

Barney lay in bed, a book beside him, the light bright on his face, his eyes closed in sleep. Across his face was a contradictory expression traced lightly. His brows puckered and his lips

grinned a little.

Valak sat in the hotel suite, writing short letters on crested stationery. Once, he interrupted himself to look at his watch. The lateness of the hour pleased him.

A church tower sent the tolling hour across the silent streets. Before she lifted a gin bottle to her lips, a pretty subdeb said to her Princeton escort, "Did you see who Muriel Leigh hooked? If he's half as good-looking as his picture, she's lucky!" Two thin, maiden ladies were driven to their pretentious home in Germantown and went up to the door together. "Well," one of them said, "I think, her mother and everything considered, that she did pretty well." An old man who wore gunny-sacking tied around his feet picked the front page of a newspaper from an ashcan, caught sight of the headline "Philadelphia's own Princess," read a line or two, and buttoned the sheet inside his ragged coat for armor against the chilly November air.

Then a greater stillness came over the city. Trolleys and milk wagons began, after a while, to make increasingly successful forays into the blank quiet. The east turned gray. A girl had been promised in marriage. The ripple of that promise had moved out from the city through the world and even now it was molded into a conventional fact. There would be descriptions of dinners, dances, parties, guests, clothes, foods, presents, priests, houses, ships, luggage, cars, bridesmaids, speeches, toasts, dead leaves, dead kings, old wars, old loves, old deeds, Paris apartments and perhaps, if the public was lucky, later descriptions of births, deaths, divorces, scandals, sprees, entanglements, bickering, ruin, suit. A girl had been promised marriage.

The winter season in Philadelphia was notably brilliant. The Prince and his fiancée made it so. He took a house in Chestnut Hill where the accumulated luster of the city foregathered. New York, Washington, and even Boston sent embassies to the functions he designed. Muriel and her aunt capitulated these affairs in their Rittenhouse Square mansion, in the happily snow-bound country house, in the Ritz and the Bellevue-Stratford. Their Christmas party afforded the Associated Press with a whole column. The New Year's reception equaled it.

After that dispatches came from Palm Beach and the West Indies where the *Argo* was cruising. The world became familiar with Muriel in her smart white dresses, Rupert in his yachting clothes standing together at the wheel, sitting leisurely in Spanish patios, or smiling informally before a background of dolphins, mackerel, and a sailfish or two.

In April they returned to the country house. The marriage was set for June sixteenth. Stenographers on New York subways could have quoted the date. In some small measure that wedding was their wedding. A Prince and an heiress. It made every possible combination of the story of Cinderella--in modern dress, with American dollars, and the official diplomatic recognition of the President of the United States.

Muriel would have married her Prince, the golden ship of their honeymoon would have sped out on the blue sea, the papers would have teemed with fascinating details--all on the sixteenth of June--except for an accident. In May it was decided to fit the royal couple and their glittering entourage into the Spring meet at Belmere. The Prince, whose sportsmanship had been praised to the echo, volunteered to race.

Not to be outdone, Jonathan announced that he would mount one of his own animals for the exhibition riding. Muriel, who had appeared for seven seasons at the Belmere events was entered as a matter of course.

So it was that, on a warm afternoon in May, society headed toward Belmere in a procession of Renaults, Lancias, Dusenbergs, and Rolls-Royces to enjoy a sport that their shining machines had antiquated but not dulled. With the marriage approaching a certain contentment had come to Jonathan Leigh. It was true that his daughter was neither gay nor rapturous, but she

had seemed in the past months to have more life and more pleasure in living. She had behaved as if she were already a queen. If he could not be sentimental toward her, he could at least be proud of her. He rode toward Belmere nodding in agreement to the continuous voice of his sister.

The grandstand was already filled. From a distance the bright colors resembled the bank of flowers in a florist's shop. A steady hum of voices rose into the air from the crowd, interrupted occasionally by the drubbing of hoofs on the hard track. Jonathan Leigh lifted his hat ceaselessly to the left and right. His stableman approached the car and they talked for a few minutes. He conducted Chloe to their box. Neither Rupert nor Muriel was there and he assumed that they were preparing for early events. Douglas Avery touched his shoulder.

"I see you entered, Jonathan."

"I am. I couldn't let my son-in-law and my daughter leave me at the post."

Avery chuckled. "Wish I could do it. Golf's my limit."

"I'm not so old, Douglas."

"That's right." Avery quickly recalled Leigh's age. His face had added fifteen years to it. "You're getting younger, too."

"He's too old for this sort of thing," Chloe interrupted.

The men laughed. There was an increased bustling at the starter's stand. Attention slowly focused there. The Prince was in the first race. The applause thundered loudly when he was led out on a fine, black two-year-old.

"A fine seat," Chloe said.

"And a fine horse," Avery commented, squinting his eyes. The other entries were taking their places. A moment of hushed suspense. The reverent, "They're off!" The din of flying feet. In a close finish, Rupert took second place. The reception he was given was greater, perhaps, than if he had been the winner. The time was good. "Horses, swords, women--those Europeans are handy with all of them." Jonathan Leigh overheard the remark made behind him. He did not turn and his smile did not fade.

Muriel failed to show in her race. She and the Prince came to the box presently, a little flushed, a little breathless. Jonathan beamed upon them proudly. The band commenced to play spiritedly. He stared out over the green fields, a look of satisfaction on his face--a look that would be accentuated when he walked up the aisle to Lohengrin.

By and by he rose. "I've got to change for my turn."

They saw him later, in his habit, sitting on a strong horse. He carried his head high; there was a smooth flowing ease in the way he guided the animal. Many of those who sat in the boxes remembered that figure at Belmere twenty-odd years before when he had ridden races to a pounding, breath-taking finish, hunched forward, streaming through the wind. They were delighted to see him again.

He sat calmly while his rivals began to show their paces. Round and round they went, walking, trotting, cantering. There were murmured judgments, half-shouted encouragements from the audience. Pierre Gauden was the first to jump his animal. Then Wilksbury. Then Jonathan Leigh. The horse behaved beautifully. His proud walk, the river of energy he poured into his gallop were greeted ecstatically.

After that, Leigh took his place for the jump. Whether he was too enfeebled to manage the jump, or too long out of practice, or whether there was some accidental faltering in the horse's stride no one could say afterward. The big mount measured itself over the ground and rose tremendously. At the apex of the leap the thousands who watched could see that the rider was unseated. The horse touched earth and ran forward. But the man who had ridden it shot

through the air in a confused bundle. He landed with a sickening thud. Everyone stood instantly. Every mouth hissed with in-drawn breath. Almost before he hit the ground, men began to rush through the gates onto the field. The crowd began to murmur with a crescendo of anxiety. Leigh lay still.

He was dead. A doctor, among the first to reach his side, needed but a single glance at the twisted position of his head to be certain of that. Nevertheless he automatically went through the gestures of ascertaining. Avery had pushed through the group when the words were pronounced. "He's dead."

The meet was going on, although half of its audience was filing from the stands, having interpreted the gestures on the field. Typewriters in the press boxes were clicking furiously. A few people stood near the Leigh box, not knowing what to do.

Muriel was paler than death. She held her cold hand in the Prince's. "Poor father!" she said in a choking voice. "Poor old father." Then she became aware of the people. "Let's get out of here, Rupert."

Rupert's eyes were seeing nothing. He held himself stiffly erect. He found the car. Valak was standing beside it, blind rage in his whole attitude. Nearby was the automobile which had brought Chloe and the dead man to the track. Chloe sat in it alone. Muriel caught a glimpse of her face and shivered. The car drove away.

Great black squares of print across front pages of the late editions announced that the socially and financially mighty Jonathan Leigh had met his death on the eve of his daughter's wedding to Rupert of Sabria. Millions of people read it with an interest they considered to be shocked. Several hundreds of celebrated persons changed their plans for the middle of June. Those who were directly connected with the family were staggered, paralyzed by this swift stroke of Fate's hand.

The marriage was postponed to an unannounced date. Valak wanted to set it for September but Chloe, agog with emotion, bursting with a final flare of indignation at her brother, was sufficiently controlled by her upbringing in the conventions to realize that September was somewhat early and that any day set at once would blaspheme the corpse which lay in a hollow square of tapers upon the altar of the Episcopal church.

Chloe was also the first to realize that, save for her share, Muriel would now inherit the full amount of the Leigh estate. The realization of that, which occurred while she sat beside the telephone in her boudoir, did much to soothe her feelings. In fact, after a moment's thought, she called Valak and informed him of it. Valak's impatience at the unexpected delay had driven that idea beyond reach. For a full hour he was almost fond of Chloe Laforge-Leigh.

Rupert called on Muriel immediately after dinner. Already on the arm of his blue suit he wore a black band. He was tactfully diffident.

"Of course," he said to Muriel, "I blame myself somewhat. I shouldn't have entered the race. Your father was such a gentleman that he felt obliged to follow me. He chose his wickedest horse--just out of sportsmanship--"

"The best thing to do is to forget it. We'll go abroad for the summer--and when we come back it will have been forgotten."

"I know. But, nevertheless, I feel badly. I was fond of your father."

Later in the evening Chloe joined them with the simpering din of approach that was requisite for lovers in her generation. She spoke feelingly about her brother--although the sentiment was evident only in the words. She then reminded Muriel that she was a very rich girl. The Prince excused himself before Chloe withdrew.

Morning was bright and sunny. A patient observer, watching the grass in Rittenhouse Square, could almost have seen the individual blades pushing up with the slow relentlessness of clock hands. The narrow streets were brimful of balmy air and the twittering of birds was carried sharply through the traffic intervals.

Douglas Avery arrived with a corps of silent men who stepped into the Square from a limousine. The lawyer walked quickly up the front steps, stood for an instant before the door as if frightened by the wreath which hung there, and rang the bell. Several reporters familiar to and in the Leigh mansion sat in the hall. Avery explained his mission to Severance, a hushed, sepulchral Severance, and went with his men to the library. The fire was cold and the chair beside it empty. Solemnity was an ill-fitting garment for Avery. He performed his duty almost irritably--opening the complicated wall safe and removing its entire contents.

He packed them carefully into a thick brief-case, spoke for a moment with the butler and returned to the limousine. It was pleasanter outdoors. His eye, just as the car drove off, caught sight of Muriel in one of the upper windows. She was wearing a crimson negligée trimmed with fur and he thought that she waved at him. When his eyes focused on the window, heavy lace had fallen across it.

CHAPTER VI

It was five o'clock: when Barney left the office. The sun was still high and the afternoon warm. He walked to his home. When he shut the door in the hall, he heard his father call from the study.

"Hello, son. Have you a little time to spare?"

"Lots."

"Good. Sit down. I have something pretty odd here."

"Odd?" Barney produced his single cigarette. "What is it?"

"Read this."

His father held out a single sheet of stiff paper which had once been folded and sealed. The inside was covered with writing and there were notarized signatures at the bottom. He commenced to read:

"The last will and testament of Jonathan Leigh, Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, November 18, 1929. To whomever it may concern, know by these presents, that I, Jonathan Leigh, being of sound mind and body, do hereby will and bequeath to my rightful daughter, Muriel Storey Leigh, all my properties, moneys, estates and possessions to have and to hold for herself and for her heirs and assigns forever and ever, subject to the following conditions: First, that in the event of her marriage to Rupert, Prince of Sabria, the amount of her dowry be excepted from my estate as elsewhere further indicated: Second, that she set aside a sum sufficient to afford, tender and give to my sister, Chloe Laforge-Leigh, the annual sum of twenty-five thousand dollars derived from the interest on the principal set aside which interest shall be regularly paid to my sister while she lives: Third, that the identity of my daughter, Muriel, shall be formally ascertained previous to the probating of this will: Fourth, that Douglas Avery, his firm or his successors in the event of my survival of him shall be appointed executors of this will: Fifth, that the following disposition be made of my personal effects--"

Barney glanced through a list of bequests made to his father, himself and others of

Leigh's friends. At last he spoke. "He did a good job--legally speaking, didn't he?"

"Perfect. Leigh was a brilliant man."

"You helped him, of course?"

"I never saw that will before. I have a copy of it--which he also made--in a safety deposit box. But he made it, as you see, quite recently. The old will was destroyed. I never read it, either. What do you think of it--aside from the fact that it is in order?"

Barney concentrated on the paper and presently he smiled. "Why--he didn't leave anything directly to his sister. It's all to be in Muriel's hands--doled out while Chloe lives."

Avery nodded. "I realize that. Chloe will be insane with rage. I presume she expected a million at least. God knows, he didn't owe it to her."

"Still--"

"Still what?"

Barney pinched his brows together. "It is a sort of--of drastic thing to do."

"Can you guess why?"

"No."

Douglas Avery leaned back in his chair so that the sunlight coming through the window made a halo of the thin hair surrounding his bald cranium. "Think, son. Read it again." While Barney read, he mused aloud. "I knew that Jonathan hated his sister. But I never thought he was a vindictive man. He must have hated her much more than the world guessed to do that. Why? Why would he despise her? Because she detested his wife? He was too magnanimous. Because she trained Muriel as she did? He never loved Muriel enough. But there must be a motive." He leaned forward suddenly. "And it's in that will."

Barney began to read aloud. When he came to the third clause, he spoke slowly, "'Third, that the identity of my daughter, Muriel, shall be formally ascertained previous to the probating of this will.' What does that mean? What's the matter with her identity?" Suddenly Barney blanched. Seeing the confirmation in his father's eyes, he whistled. His spine tingled. "Merciful God! He suspected that Muriel--the Muriel we know--wasn't--"

"Wasn't his daughter at all," Avery finished unsteadily.

Barney leaped to his feet and paced across the room. He flung his cigarette into the grate and lit another. His hands clenched. "Why didn't any of us think of it before?"

"That was the marvel to me, son."

Barney's electrified thoughts fairly outstripped his words. "I can see it all. I can see it perfectly. It's like a flash of light in a dark room where you've been stumbling over things you felt but couldn't recognize by touching. She's different from her father. Different utterly from what I've read and imagined about her mother. More different, even, than Chloe could ever make her. She's so cold and aloof and difficult. Good Lord! Do you think she knows--?"

"Muriel? I think not."

Barney was staggered again by the enormity of the thing. "How--who--what?"

Douglas Avery rose and walked to the window. He looked out on the street, his son at his side. That moment was one in which it was impossible to sit calmly. "Just recollect things a little, Barney. Daisy Storey was sent abroad for her health when Muriel--the real one--was a baby. An infant. Chloe went with them. Daisy lost her life on the voyage. Chloe waited two weeks in France for a boat back to America. And transportation was a little slower in those days. She came in by way of New York. When she arrived here, Jonathan was insane with grief. And one baby, remember, looks very much like another. She could have found a dozen substitutes."

"But why? Why should she do it?"

Avery turned. "Can't you see? Chloe hated Daisy Storey more than anything else on earth. She hated her first for breaking the long and high-born line of Leigh marriages. She probably hated her even more because Daisy was beautiful and talented. And there was still another reason--one that we in this decade are just beginning to understand. Think of Chloe, a frustrated, ingrowing old maid--even then--living for her stuffy society friends, her passion for royal families, her celebrated brother. Suddenly another woman robs her completely of her hold on Jonathan, makes Jonathan not only heedless of her but conscious of her true personality. That is complicated, but Chloe must have felt the force of it.

"See that hatred swell into an all-consuming thing. See it grow like a fungus all through her. She stays with them--or near them. I believe she moved from the house in the Square before the marriage. But she hangs on. Either she cannot let go entirely--or else she is waiting for her chance. I prefer to think it was merely a hanging on--a sort of martyrdom, a masochism. That is more like her.

"Then Daisy becomes ill. The trip abroad is suggested. Daisy cannot leave the child. Jonathan cannot leave this country at the time. His fortune is at stake. Chloe volunteers to go. It is a sort of grim magnanimity. Acid generosity. Or acid disguised as generosity. That is Chloe again. Then--three-quarters of the way across the Atlantic there is the disaster."

Avery paused and wiped his head with his handkerchief. "Now. Get the picture. There's Chloe--hard-faced, heavy-breasted Chloe, sitting day and night in the cabin--stuffy and confined--heaving on the swells of that storm--with the baby. A squalling, hungry little human bundle. That baby becomes the symbol of all that, to Chloe's mind, has ruined her life and the name of Leigh. The hatred is transferred to it. Imagine the day-by-day change as she looks at the child--a change in her eyes and face. A slow, insidious metamorphosis. She thinks of the years ahead and of the growth of the child--years in which she will be compelled to pretend a love for it. The thought is insufferable. Then--the plan comes to her. Life would be more tolerable if the child was any child except Daisy's. And the hour is even then at hand--see?"

He stopped. Barney was looking at him as if he had been hypnotized. He drew a long breath. Slowly his poise returned. He grinned. "And you didn't want to take up criminal law. Why--in court--with that--"

His father shrugged. "I'm afraid the stupendous size of the thing has taken hold of me. But you see--don't you?"

"I don't see. I know. One thing--though. Why can't you hypothecate another step?"

"Namely?"

"That it wasn't a wave which pushed Daisy overboard."

Avery shook his head slowly. "No. No. That's wrong, son. Chloe may be a woman of deep passions--and many of those passions may not be holy in the Christian sense. But she's not a murderess. Not that type at all."

"I suppose not. Otherwise she'd have done as much for Muriel."

"Precisely. "

Another question rose in Barney's mind. "But--now what to do? What the devil to do! You couldn't convince a jury in a million years. You can't just say--"

"Naturally. But I have something--"

"Something? "

"I have the ink footprint that was made of Daisy Storey's baby in the hospital at the time of birth."

"You have! How did you get that?"

"It was among Jonathan's papers--in his safe. I presume there is another in the hospital files."

"Did you get hers?"

"Did I what? Oh. Did I go over to Rittenhouse Square and ask the incumbent Muriel to be kind enough to give me an exact impression of her right foot? No."

"Why not? That must be the first thing."

"Let's sit down again. This is pretty serious, son."

"And damned exciting."

"It's something for a good deal of sober thought. Give me a match. I never seem to have any. Now, when I read the will this noon, I saw at once that it was correct enough, but irregular. The fact that he had made no direct bequest to Chloe surprised me--it alarmed my instincts. I connected it with the identity clause very soon. I--"

"Good head!"

"Not that. I have been the lawyer for Leigh since we were youngsters. I know him. He would do nothing without a reason. Then, on going through his papers, I found the regular annotated, authorized footprint. He had preserved it with the most important things. It was evident that he intended it to be used in connection with the will."

"Then he knew all the time! "

"He didn't know. I don't imagine he ever tried to discover--exactly."

"But why on earth didn't he?"

Avery shook his head. "Only an intimate knowledge of Jonathan Leigh would answer that perfectly. You see, you can draw as graphic and as singular an imaginary picture of him as you can of Chloe. When the child--the baby--came back, he was distracted. He ignored the wave of half-leering, falsely sympathetic publicity. He drew into himself, retired, devoted his life to this child. All his hope was centered in it.

"As it grew older and developed into the person we know, he was slowly estranged. With the hot agony of his grief somewhat abated, he began to think again. That required years--blank years. He thought with time cycles instead of minutes--thought as a prisoner thinks. The suspicion must have been locked in his subconscious for a long time. It is possible that something Chloe did or said brought it into the light of recognition. He had imagination. He understood people. Once he had guessed, he began to believe.

"Why did he do nothing? Because he was proud. For a thousand reasons, but mostly pride. He was a Leigh and he lived like a Leigh. He wanted to be proud of his daughter. Probably he did not even want to be certain of the truth--otherwise his sense of integrity would have conquered pride. He wanted to avoid what would happen if the truth were known. I mean, the disgrace of this child in his home, the utter disgrace of Chloe, the attachment of more public rumor to his name, the abusive reawakening of his beloved wife's name. All that. He was too proud to see his house leveled to ashes, his line broken, himself an object of pity.

"He made up his mind. He never breathed his suspicion. But what torture the years must have been! When he saw this child grow into the sophisticated icicle that she is! When he looked unspeaking every day upon the smug triumph of his sister! Yes--I think that we can say Jonathan Leigh was unhappiest of them all.

"Finally--the time for the girl's marriage came. Leigh could not decide what his daughter--his supposed daughter wanted. He did what she asked. Perhaps he had a premonition of death. I doubt it, because he was a true agnostic and skeptic. He was Episcopalian only because of his sister and for the sake of convenience. Perhaps he felt that to allow an interloper in his home was

not fair to Daisy's memory. In any case, he decided that before the bulk of his estate went to this girl, he would leave a loophole through which fate might intervene. I happen to be fate."

"You?"

"Certainly. Don't you see? Jonathan Leigh washed his hands of everything. That was the most his pride would allow. He was not interested in what happened after his death. He merely wished to live in peace. So he set into his will a clause he knew would stimulate my curiosity--and he left whatever proof or evidence of Chloe's trickery he had come upon in life."

"The footprint."

"The footprint--and an address."

Barney raised his eyebrows. "Address?"

"Certainly. Address." Avery thumbed the papers in his brief-case. "Here it is. Just--'155 Alexander Street, Mayville, Ohio'--scrawled across a sheet of paper."

"What has that got to do with this?"

"I'm not sure. It's the only--what I might call non-committal--paper in his whole collection. At a guess, and only a guess, it is the address of the other girl."

Barney flinched as if he had been struck. "The other girl! Good God! I hadn't thought of her! The real one. Alive!"

"I presume so," his father said slowly. "I should imagine that Jonathan found Chloe writing to or receiving letters from this address. He jotted it down--for me. For us--in case we decided to go into this matter any further."

"Of course, you will?"

"I don't know, son. That's why I called you in here. Shall I? Or shall I not? Jonathan decided not to do it--while he lived. That is an argument against it. On the other hand, he left things so that I could easily hold up the will and start an investigation. That is an argument in favor of--I suppose. Chloe's confession--and further proof--would be necessary to make the thing legal."

"Very clearly, he left it up to me. I wish he had talked about it. But I suppose talking was what he hated most. I'm hopelessly at sea."

"Legally, you're bound to look into it."

"I know, son. But there are places where the laws of men and the laws of mankind don't quite jibe. This seems to be a candidate for that paradox. If I do. Suppose I do. What happens? Chloe is disgraced. Muriel, trained for twenty years to inherit the Leigh millions, to live as a Leigh heiress, to do the name honor in the world's eyes, is suddenly reduced to penury. And who takes the Leigh name and millions? A girl in a little Ohio town who probably doesn't know what it means to spend fifty dollars at once, who never heard of Patou, who couldn't read a French menu or spell 'dowager,' and who thinks that a knife, fork and spoon are all the table silver ever used by anyone. Mayville suggests that, doesn't it?"

"Mayville's a pretty name."

"You're romantic. Chloe probably gave the baby to a servant to be raised. Mayville is perhaps nothing but a general store and a post office in the farm country. She may even be married to some yokel."

"Great heavens! I never thought of that."

"We must--we must think of all that. We must think at once. I cannot hold up the will. A few days at the most are available." Avery stared solemnly at his son. "Now, boy, what's your best judgment on that small problem?"

Barney did not answer for several moments. His gaze was abstracted, concentrated.

Finally he turned it upon his father. "In the first place, I'd compare Muriel's footprints with this one. There's a good chance that she is the girl after all-that her father had a pipe dream and that we've built up a story no Philadelphia gossip, in her wildest and most inspired moments, would be capable of thinking. After that--"

"Yes?"

"After that--well, that's the first thing."

"You asked me to come in?" Muriel said to Mr. Avery. "Things to sign?"

There was nothing to sign. Avery made a hasty invention. "Well--we did wish for a specimen of your signature."

Muriel wrote across a sheet of paper he offered. "Why the delay about reading the will?" she asked casually.

Avery smiled. "A thing or two for us to take care of first."

The girl nodded. "Chloe was furious."

"I'm very sorry. We're acting exactly as your father directed. I've arranged a temporary account for you, by the way. Your pass book is here."

"Thank you. I'll be going if that's all."

"One other little thing. Sorry to trouble you." His voice was placid, as if the thing he was about to ask was usual and to be expected. "We'll want your footprint."

"My footprint!"

"Naturally. Matter of form. For comparison with the original made when you were born." He smiled at the girl. "That rather handsome foot of yours, Muriel, is the best insurance you have."

"You mean, I've got to get all daubed up with ink?"

"It won't be bad. And it washes off with water, I understand. Miss Henderson of our office will fix it in a moment." He rang a bell and the secretary appeared. "Please take Miss Leigh to Miss Henderson. She knows what to do."

Muriel rose, a trace of annoyance on her face, but no sign of suspicion. "The law is so damn silly," she said and walked out of the room.

Ten minutes later Barney fairly burst into his father's office. Douglas Avery had his back to the door and was gazing over the traffic in the street below. He heard his son enter, turned, nodded and looked away. Barney snatched up the two papers on the desk--one of them old and yellow-edged, bearing a print unbelievably small, the other fresh and still moist with a space between the ball and heel of Muriel's long and narrow foot. He held his breath while he looked. Slowly he put them down. His father moved beside him.

"You see?" Avery said.

"Different."

"Absolutely. The girl who was just in here is no more Muriel Leigh than I am-and she hasn't the slightest idea of it." A pause. "By one telephone call to any of a hundred places I can start the greatest uproar Philadelphia has ever known. And I haven't the faintest idea of what to do."

"I have."

Avery stared at his son. "What--what?"

"Don't do anything until I've taken a look at that girl in Ohio."

"But it's only a guess--a vague deduction-that the address had anything to do with the girl."

Barney smiled. "You think it has, don't you?"

"Still--"

"So do I. It's a hunch."

"We could get in touch with Chloe," Avery suggested, "and ask her abruptly about the address. She was never good at concealing emotions--"

Barney's eyes narrowed. "Wouldn't it be better for the present if she were not suspicious?"

"Possibly. But she will be when Muriel tells her we took a footprint today."

"She might be. On the other hand, she can't be certain that we have the original hospital print. And probably Muriel won't tell her. There isn't any reason she should. We'd better run that chance."

"Well?"

"I'll catch a train tonight."

Avery pondered. At last he smiled. "Do it."

CHAPTER VII

The midnight train lurched and jolted from the Broad Street Station through the yards and finally settled into the regular and metrical clatter which would carry it westward for the remainder of the night. Barney hunted through a valise with a blind hand, withdrew a copy of the Rubaiyat, composed his long body beneath the quivering light of his berth and read one line fifteen times without becoming cognizant of its sense. Finally he put down the volume and stared at the design on the window curtains.

The next morning was to be a spectacular one for him, although the elements of its excitement would be invisible to the general eye. His mind rambled through the drama he anticipated. In one of his suitcases was the photostat of a baby's footprint. A fortune and a great name, publicity, widespread astonishment, everything in the cornucopia of civilization depended on the curves of that etching. To Barney, the Muriel Leigh who had lived and matured in Philadelphia had already been thrust into the background of events. In her place was the unknown girl from Mayville, Ohio,-a shining-haired deity destined for ascendancy to a throne of romance.

The romance was of Barney's own making and if he gave a thought to the tenuous substance of its construction it was to reiterate that Jonathan Leigh would not have preserved a strange address in his safe unless it pointed toward the girl, that the girl herself must be charming because nearly all the Leigh ladies were charming and because the beauty of Leigh's wife had been an international toast in the bizarre and misty golden nineties. He used the words "golden nineties" to himself and thought of the present circumstances as a logical result of those days when (in his opinion) horsehair sofas, the conquest of the West, terrapin and Victorian prudery had been mingled in a preposterous combination of social inconsistencies. Only from such an age could come a Chloe Laforge-Leigh who would detest her brother because he married a singer, who would nevertheless live in her brother's house, who, standing on a pinnacle of self-righteous indignation, would substitute babies and execute a decorous future for an impostor.

This--and Barney smiled to himself--was the hand of Queen Victoria herself stubbornly reaching into the present from a fussy grave. Barney replanned his campaign for the dozenth

time. Setting up the hypotheses for it diminished the aura with which he had surrounded the enterprise. If his guess was correct, it would be a simple matter to locate the real Muriel Leigh. If she proved to be an unpleasant person, or a stupid one, or one not fitted in any of the innumerable ways he could readily imagine, then he would quickly fold the wings of fancy and return by the next train.

In that case, his father would probate and execute the Leigh will, the false Muriel would inherit a fortune and marry a prince, and the society of a dozen capitals would be deprived of a fine furore. If, however, he accepted even dubiously the Mayville girl, the telegraph wires girding the earth in perpetual tension would vibrate with news and unguessable consequences would rapidly become fact. He could picture the boiling frustration of Chloe, the pale disappointment of Muriel, the busy muttering of tongues unleashed.

Extreme care, as his father had repeated endlessly, was needed. He could not call on the girl, perceive, for example, that she was pretty, and say, "My dear young lady, if you happen to have a footprint that matches one in my pocket, I can guarantee your immediate acquisition of many millions of dollars." On the contrary. Barney's father had said at the station, "Don't let her know who you are or where you come from or what your errand is. Don't even try for her footprint unless you are sure she is ideal. And then get it without her knowledge."

Barney had grinned ruefully. "And how do I do that?"

"You've got to find a way. If we took her impression openly and gave the whole thing up afterward--and if someone knew she was an adopted child and that same person learned you were a Leigh attorney--well--you can see what a hick town Sherlock would do with that."

Barney's thoughts lost some of their continuity. After a time he reached into the Pullman hammock and moved his watch from his trousers to a place beneath his pillows. It was one-thirty. The train was moving swiftly. He turned out the light. In the darkness a flush of grandeur filled him as he considered the strategic importance of his errand. There was a story--his mind ran on--about a girl named Cinderella and her wicked sisters and a pumpkin that turned into a coach. In that story a very handsome prince had gone everywhere in the land with a glass slipper, searching for the girl whose foot would fit it precisely. Cinderella's foot had fitted, so she married the Prince and lived happily ever after. Or was it a prince? And a glass slipper? Whoever heard of glass slippers? Wasn't it just a young lawyer with a footprint? Or, perhaps, wasn't it a Prince named Rupert who had something to do with it all? Barney tried feebly to straighten out that puzzle and in the attempt he fell asleep.

He breakfasted in the station in Columbus and caught an accommodation train for Mayville. The day was sun-drenched. It belonged to one of the enchanted procession of mid-spring days that conjure forth the last, recalcitrant leaves and powder the woods with flowers. From the windows of the coach which moved spasmodically from one town to the next he saw an infinity of green rows burgeoning in the farm lands. He wanted poignantly to be out of doors.

A man who had taken the seat beside Barney agreed with his evident thoughts. "Ohio's purty in the spring."

"It's swell."

The native ruminated that word. "Wall--you might call it swell. Though it ain't hoity-toity." He allowed a silence. "Stranger?"

"Yes."

"Where you headed?"

"Mayville."

He nodded. "Mayville's a right nice town. County seat, you know. Got the Punkin Show

there in October--courthouse--and that there Demar College. Take me, though, now I live in Westbridge. It's a little better soil for most crops around Westbridge. Mebbe not so citified. But homey."

"It all looks homey."

"It is, son. Ohio's a downright homey state. You gain' to the college in Mayville?"

Barney smiled. "No. I never heard of the college. How big is it?"

"Wall, last year they had nigh onto five hundred students. I know because my boy Jeffry's aimin' to go there. Most of it's agricultural but he wants to study chemistry. I'm aimin' to let him. Jeffry's a stout-willed boy. Well--I'll be gettin' off here. Goodbye. My name's Townley. G. T. Townley." He held out his hand.

Barney shook it and then turned toward the window. He was trying to conceive a similar or parallel thing taking place in Philadelphia, the "Friendly City." Mr. Townley had taken it for granted that he, Barney, having nothing important to do, would be pleased to exchange a few words with anyone on the general pleasantness of Ohio in the springtime. And Barney had been pleased.

The conductor touched his shoulder. "Next stop Mayville, mister."

The train roared pacifically across a long bridge that spanned a meandering river. The farmhouses thickened and changed into town houses, white, gabled and sitting in lawns. There was a curve, a lumber yard, a collection of shoddy, unpainted laborers' homes, a splitting up and complication of the rails, a glimpse of a big brick building on a tree-clad hill, and the diminuendo arrival of the squat, red station. Barney gathered his bags together and stepped down from the platform to the ground.

In the mud-rutted parking space on the opposite side of the station were two automobiles bearing "For Hire" signs. He hailed one of them. "Hotel," he said.

"Which one?"

"Which one's the best?"

"Wal--I'd go to the Empire if I was you. It's located better than the Select. Dollar a day."

"Fine."

They hurried past the unkempt section adjacent to the train yards and were presently moving down Main Street. The stores were not distinctive, but they were well kept and marked with individual evidences of business-getting progress. Main Street--he saw that its real name was Toledo Avenue--was paved with cobblestone. A number of pleasant thoroughfares led north toward the hilly portion of Mayville. Barney registered at the hotel, which bore on its guest-book, its blotters and its electric sign the legend, "Mayville's tallest structure--head and shoulders above everything else!" and which did not add that this advantage was gained by four stories. He walked up to his room, left his bags, and presently returned to the lobby.

"How do I get to Alexander Street?" he asked the clerk.

"Third street left."

"Thanks."

Barney was not impressed by the house which bore the number "155." It was clapboard, painted drab and white, with a long front porch decorated with a scroll-saw frieze. Two gables juttred angularly through its slate roof. A pair of large maples stood on the lawn, the grass thinning and changing into moss as it approached their boles. The back yard, which he could see over the picket fence, was partly vegetable garden, spaded into neat beds, partly apiary--there were a dozen hives--and partly lawn in which four clothes poles stood and on the edge of which was a round black spot where trash had been consumed.

The house where Cinderella lived. An elderly gentleman emerged from the slanting cellar door. He wore that curious round helmet of screen which is called a "bee-hat" and he carried a rake. Barney could not see his face and inferred that he was aged solely from his posture and movements. The bee-hat peered at the youth lounging on the fence and turned unemotionally toward the gardens.

For a long time Barney could not think of a pretext suitable to commence a conversation with the old man. He did not know the man's name. He knew nothing about bees or about gardening. He had invented no business as an alibi for his behavior. He merely stood at the fence and stared. Finally he grinned and opened the gate.

The old man looked up at his approach and Barney put on his most amenable expression. "You'll pardon me, but I was interested in your bees."

"Bees? Bees? You want some honey?"

"No. Rather--yes. Do you sell it?"

"Mostly to the markets. And a few friends. But I guess we could spare some. Janet said there was a good deal still left from the winter." Barney could see through the hat, and he felt an immediate relief. The man's face was calm and kindly. There was light and life in his gray eyes. "We do a small business in honey," he went on. "I like bees. They're mighty interesting."

Barney nodded gravely. "They must be. I've read that they were. As a matter of fact, however, I've never really had a chance to see them at close range." His eagerness to have the old gentleman return to "Janet" was great, but he could see no means of forcing the topic.

"If you've never seen bees at close range," the man was saying, "you've missed a good deal." He stopped and pondered. "You from Demar?"

Barney frowned and then remembered. "The college? No. I'm from the East. New York. Never been in Mayville before. Came on business. Lovely town. I just took a walk this morning--and saw your bees. I was watching them when you came out."

The man seemed relieved. "So I noticed. I thought perhaps you were a new addition to the bunch that is always pestering my daughter. But--you're a stranger." His mind reverted to the original subject. "I'll go inside and look for that honey. I wouldn't go too near the hives. The bees don't know you."

"Do they know you?" Barney asked, following his involuntary host.

"Certainly. I seldom get stung. But once in a while they forget--so my daughter insists on this arrangement." He tapped the cylindrical mesh head-gear. "Come in."

Barney had a vague impression that the kitchen, into which he was conducted, was scrupulously clean. A few minutes later, possessed of a large jar of amber-colored honey, he was ushered to the gate.

"My name is Avery," he said and held out his hand. "Thank you for your kindness."

"Why--thank you, Mr. Avery. My name is Jamison. Sorry I had to make you wait for the honey."

"My daughter always puts things away. She has what she calls a system." He chuckled. Barney chuckled in response--a light, intimate male chuckle that insinuated he also knew the unreliability of feminine "systems." He opened the gate. "Daughter in college here, I presume?"

"No. No. Demar is not coeducational. She works in Dorman's. It's the boys that come here for her. I mistook you for one. Well--good day, Mr. Avery."

Ten minutes later Barney knew that Dorman's was the local stationery and candy store on the corner of Main and Winter streets. Not five minutes after that he was standing inside Dorman's--face to face with Janet Jamison.

She had been laughing before he entered and there was a remainder of laughter in her face. It was a remarkable face, a vivid, breath-taking face; bright lips, dusky gray eyes and radiant hair that had been cut short and made a splash of gold against any background. It startled Barney and it thrilled him and in that moment he could not quite bring himself to realize that it was the face of a human being. He caught himself wishing that he had looked at a picture of Daisy Storey before he left Philadelphia. That thought was submerged in a personal reverie. And then he remembered his manners.

"I-I wanted--" he began.

She spoke at the same time, and he checked himself as if to listen for her voice. It was an infinitely gentle and appealing voice--one that no display counter, no professional practice could have made impersonal. It ignored his rudeness probably because she was accustomed to such a thing but seemingly as if he had not been rude.

"Is there something I can do for you?"

Barney had partial control of himself. "Why--some writing paper. Stationery. Letter paper."

She walked a little way. "Something like this?"

He looked from her, through the window, at the street. Even the realization of this triumphant discovery was inadequate to explain the wonder, the dumb jubilation of that instant. She was gorgeous! If she had nothing but her looks, the Leigh millions should be laid humbly at her feet. At her feet. The idea awoke another. What if she did not have the right feet--what if the whole episode was merely coincidence--what if she were merely Janet Jamison? Nothing. She was there, he repeated to himself.

"This is our finest grade of paper," she was saying.

"Oh, yes. I'll take it." She turned her back and dexterously wrapped the box. When she handed it to him he asked, "Do you carry fountain pens?"

"Certainly. " "Maybe I better take one. Need something to write with."

He was out on the street again, walking toward the hotel. His arms were full of bundles, but he scarcely knew their contents. Janet had watched him go with an expression of surprise on her features. The approach of most young men to her had been much less dramatic and their consequent reaction less obvious. She realized that he had made the purchases entirely on her account--either to afford an excuse for being in her company or to impress her with his financial nonchalance. Many girls might have been merely amused or vainly excited. Janet was chiefly occupied by astonishment.

Barney, sitting in the single upholstered chair in his hotel room, gazing at the bundles on the bed, began to reason as sanguinely and as honestly as he could. The moment was a very interesting one in his life. Few, if, indeed, any, young men as a national group equal the American youth in his early twenties. Sport has made him physically strong and graceful; a catholic education as well as his standard of tolerance has given him intellectual breadth; Anglo-Saxon blood has provided him with regular and impressive features; there is humor in him, *joie de vivre*, courage and honesty. The definite cognizance of and the frequent entrance into the petty compromise, the moral and social crookedness of life which marks so many of his elders with the visible stamp of hypocrisy has not touched him. His generation is among the first on earth, in fact, which has announced its aversion to the old schedules of permitted indecencies. His idea of life is that, if there must be evil, a gangster with a machine gun shooting in a public square is preferable to the time-honored smug deacon foreclosing the widow's mortgage with the same hand that passes the collection plate.

It was with that same attitude that he viewed the present circumstances. He had already admitted that his ecstasy at the sight of Janet outstripped his interest in the legal aspects of her case. He, himself, had been touched by the intense pressure behind her steady eyes. He could not lie about that. On the other hand, he was not callow in matters of sex and love. He did not believe in love at first sight and so many of the attributes of love were clearly understood by him, had been labeled with psychological names by him, that he recognized what remained as a rare and almost unattainable thing. His generation also knew very clearly that all too few couples even approach a continual felicity, quite apart from a relationship that might be called love.

Nevertheless, thinking about her in his room, he picked significant items from his brain with the delicacy and care that one withdraws jackstraws from a tangled heap. There was the feeling that, if she was the real Muriel, he would like to become her best friend before she went to Philadelphia. The feeling was disguised as brotherliness. There was a vague and personal dread of what might happen to her in the cultured barbarism of Philadelphia society. As her lawyer, that dread should be at most a mere worry. And there was his confusion when he saw her.

It had gone, now--a momentary perturbation, a temporary flurry. He could act composedly. He could plan. First, he would have to wire his father that Janet was satisfactory. She might, he realized, be engaged. He made a mental note to look for a ring when he saw her again--which would be very soon--in an hour, if possible. The wire would have to be disguised so that no small-town, gossiping telegraph agent would comprehend anything from it. After that, he would try to make her acquaintance.

He walked up Main Street to the telegraph office and sent two words: "Ravishing presentable."

Then he returned to Dorman's. The proprietor was bending over his desk in the office. Janet was arranging a display. She smiled when she saw him.

Barney was bland. "I forgot ink."

"Oh! I should have reminded you."

Her concern was genuine. In a pause that was scarcely noticeable Barney wondered if she, too, had been disturbed from her tranquility by his entrance in the store, he hoped she had, he realized that the idea was conceited and ridiculous, he was amazed at the mental complications to which the last hour had given rise, and he framed the words which he spoke next--all without taking his eyes from her. "Not at all. I suppose, really, I have writing things at the hotel. But I need them, anyway."

She held up a bottle. "Writes blue--turns black?"

"Fine." He produced the money for the ink casually. "Nice town, Mayville."

"It's pretty-parts of it. But it's dreadfully small."

Her manner indicated that she would converse a little longer. Yet it was not too friendly, not the manner that would welcome banter with every traveling salesman. Barney lifted his eyebrows. His plan was now to have its chance. "It's small. But I'm fond of small towns. Why, Mayville gave me an example of what I mean this morning. I'd just arrived and I took a walk--down a street called--Alexander, I think. I met an old gentleman who kept bees. He told me all about them and even sold me a jar of honey. That could never happen in a city--and I think it's charming."

The illustration was introduced off-handedly and her surprise was unsuspecting. "Isn't that funny!"

"Isn't what funny?"

"That old man was my father."

Barney looked incredulous and then grinned. "You see! That couldn't happen in a big city--either."

"Of all the coincidences!" She halted. "Did he find the honey all right? I put it away."

"He found it--after he had substituted spectacles for his bee-hat."

Janet began to laugh. "Poor dad! He's so--"

She remembered suddenly that she was talking to a stranger.

The time had arrived for the last strategic move. Barney put the ink in his pocket and half turned. Then, as if on sudden inspiration, he faced her again. "I just had an idea. By the way--my name is Avery--Barney Avery--and I represent a New York and Philadelphia corporation. This is my card. We--my company that is--plans a rather large scale enterprise for which Mayville is being considered as a possible site. I do not want to go to the regular real estate brokers, because they will make my presence generally known, as well as my intentions--and I could not operate at the same advantage. But I do want to find someone in whom I can have confidence and who would be able to guide me around the country in and near Mayville. I'm a total stranger and it occurred to me that you might be interested in acting as a sort of guide. You seem to know the vicinity--and that's all I require. I could easily furnish you with credentials concerning myself--and the commission, if we located our object, would be quite handsome."

Into her eyes came a repressed eagerness. "That's very kind of you--but, you see, I'm busy here all day."

He made a gesture of indifference. "You could do it after hours. I'd prefer someone like you--to a broker. What time do you stop?"

"Five."

"Why--that's splendid! We'd have a good deal of daylight."

"But I have to get supper for father."

"Afterward, then. I don't need any violent daylight. Just enough to look over the superficial topographical aspects." That, he thought, was effective. It sounded like a quotation from a prospectus.

"Why wouldn't father do?" she asked suddenly.

He was not prepared for that. But he was game, and it was better than nothing. He could see her when the trips were ended, by the simple expedient of extending them to the verge of supper time. "Fine! I hadn't thought of your father. I'll see him at once."

She shook her head. Somewhere in her eyes was a laughter he did not understand. "Father wouldn't go. He hates automobiles--and I suppose you wouldn't condescend to a horse and buggy--"

"If necessary--" Barney began.

She blushed a little. "No. If you really think I could make some money--I'll try. I only suggested father to see--to see--well--to see if you were serious about looking at land. You see, when a girl works in a store there are a good many men who--well--try to put over a fast one--if you understand."

Barney's laughter boomed out--delighted and reassuring laughter. "Boy! What a head! No--I'm serious enough." He began to laugh again.

"Miss Jamison!"

They turned quickly. Mr. Dorman had risen from his desk with a trace of annoyance on his face. He nodded curtly toward the door where a customer stood, unnoticed either by Barney, whose back was turned, or by Janet, who really should have seen.

In his room again Barney executed a dance that was a combination of many curious steps. He could not be sure whether he was happier that she had accepted his trumped-up offer or that she had been so clever in protecting herself. He wanted her to be intelligent--and her intelligence seemed to be of a high order.

The telegram he sent to his father after lunch caused Douglas Avery a few minutes of concentrated deductive reasoning and afforded him with an extremely amused smile afterward. It read:

"Douglas Avery, Treasurer,
Rittenhouse Company,
188 8 Locust Street,
Philadelphia.

Please place Miss Janet Jamison one fifty-five Alexander Street Mayville on payroll twenty-five weekly as locating agent. B. Avery."

The name and address were correct, but the treasurership and the company were, of course, fictitious. The senior partner of Avery and Avery guessed the action behind the wire, as Barney knew he would, and, that night, he said to his wife,

"Barney's a chip off the old block, all right."

That silver-haired and dignified lady nodded contentedly. "Barney is a good boy."

"And he'll make a great lawyer."

CHAPTER VIII

At seven o'clock Barney, in a "Drive Yourself" flivver, drew up at the gate of 155 Alexander Street. Janet and her father came out to meet him.

"I told daddy you dropped into the store," she said, "and he's been trying ever since to remember if he told you that I worked there."

Barney saw that another deception was necessary. "Why--that's too bad. But even if he had mentioned it--I would scarcely have remembered and connected the two facts."

"That's what I insisted."

Barney smiled "In any case, Mr. Jamison, I'd like you to have this copy of a telegram I sent to my company. It puts things on a business basis." He turned to Janet. "I thought afterward that it would be fairer to pay you a small salary for your work--we may not find what we want and then you'd be disappointed on the commission."

She read the message aloud. "Twenty-five dollars! Why--that's twice what I make at Dorman's."

Barney nodded. "I know--but your work may be only for a few days. Now. Shall we start? And will you ride in the front seat--or would you prefer the back?"

"I'll ride in front, of course."

"You're sure you can manage one of those things?" Mr. Jamison asked. "All my life." "Well--I've kept out of them all mine. Janet can drive. The Demar boys taught her. But I was born in an age that didn't have much respect for machines. Or confidence in them. Bees are more my style."

Barney laughed respectfully. "That's quite understandable."

"Well--be careful."

The car rumbled and moved away. "Father's not fuss-budgety about many things," Janet said.

"He's a grand fellow. Which way?"

Afterward Barney remembered vaguely that he saw the old water works, the something-or-other lumber yard, a half dozen farms that were for sale, and a machine factory that had been built during the war and since then stood deserted. But he remembered vividly that Janet had been sitting beside him all that time, that she smelled very faintly of a dulcet perfume, that whenever she laughed he felt forced to grip the steering wheel tightly to keep from taking her in his arms. That was precisely what he desired to do. He had known that feeling before, with other girls--but never so poignantly and never when it was accompanied by a chivalrous horror at the force of the temptation.

He remembered such things as--

"Sometimes I get so tired of being in Mayville, of having always been in Mayville. Sometimes I even feel that I haven't always been in Mayville--that somewhere, in another life perhaps--I was a queen or a princess and everybody knew about me and I went to all the grand places. That's pretty dopey--isn't it?"

"I don't think so."

Such things as--

"The boys at Demar are pretty nice. Lots of them. They're mostly country boys from around here working their way through college. But you get tired of them. They're sort of--rowdy. That's disloyal. And it's your fault, because I never knew a man who came from New York before. Not a young one, anyway. Some of the people here go there for swank. But I guess they don't mean much in New York."

"I really come from Philadelphia."

"Did you go to college?"

"Yale."

"That's a big one, isn't it? I got through High School. Mother died when I was in my third year. Afterward I went to work. There's nothing much else to do in Mayville."

And thinks like--

"We're not really so backwoodsy and dumb. We go to the movies--and that teaches us what to wear. I make my own things, mostly. We have radios and all winter at night we can tune in on New York. I'll bet we were talking about Rudy Vallee as soon as you people were. And we read the new books, and, of course, the magazines. My best friend works in the Carnegie Library. But I imagine this is interrupting your work--"

"Not a bit."

"It was luck to have a chance like this. Plain luck. Father has always wanted to go up to Sandusky to see the bee farms there and I've been saving for it. He'll be able to do it, now. If we last a week, that is." A smile. "That place might interest you. It's a factory--been deserted since the war."

"Really? Let's take a look at it."

Three days, golden days, went by like slow ships in the sunset. Most of it was sunset, because it was after supper and until twilight that they went together on a rambling inspection of the countryside. Barney read and loafed and walked through Mayville in the daytime. Later in the evening, when the ride was ended, he sat in his room and thought, he would have said, about

nothing in particular. On the third day she invited him up on the porch and he rocked in the twilight with Janet and her father, talking about property and Ohio floods and bees, and eating pie that she had made of berries she had canned.

"Your father, I take it, Mr. Avery, is an officer in this Rittenhouse Company?" Mr. Jamison had said.

"Yes. The treasurer."

"I presume you're not very comfortable in a little place like this?"

"I'm happier than I've ever been."

"I'm glad to hear it. Most city people miss the peace of a place like this. There's philosophy in it, young man."

"That's true. The philosophy."

"Exactly. Take bees. Bees are like people--"

"Oh, father! You don't even know that Mr. Avery cares about bees."

"I suspect he does, Janet. He seems to have a feeling for things. Most people don't. Most people go around saying this is the machine age or the iron age or the age of electricity. Forgetting all about nature and not even right at that. You know, young man, this isn't any grand age. It's a puny one. Not the iron age. The gadget age."

Barney chuckled. "That's a pretty good name for it."

"Sure it is. Take me. For thirty-seven years I carried mail here in Mayville. Nothing but a leather bag and shank's mare. Then I got to be assistant postmaster. And I ran head-on into it. The gadgets. Three dinguses for canceling stamps. Twenty-eight rubber gadgets for marking letters and packages. This side up. No hooks. Special delivery. Registered. First class mail. Second class-and so on. Trick locks on the mail sacks. Trick chutes for night mailing. Why, it got so complicated you couldn't even take time from mail-sorting and gadget-operating to read the postcards." He laughed with gentle mirth. "So, when I was retired, I began on bees. Once a year they swarm. When it's cold, they hibernate. The rest of the time they just gather honey, drop by drop, all day long. Simple kind of life."

Later in the evening he had gone to bed and Janet and Barney had moved their chairs closer together. They did not rock any more, and Barney thought that he was going to kiss her. He dreamed afterward that he did. But in point of fact they had sat until late in the sweet darkness talking barely above a whisper about things they never tried to remember.

When Barney returned to the hotel the night clerk looked up from a magazine he had been reading. "You're Avery, aren't you?"

"Philadelphia's been trying to get you long distance. Told me to put the call through whenever you came in."

"All right. I'll take it in my room."

When the phone on the wall finally tinkled, Barney heard his father's voice. "Hello, son! I haven't heard anything from you for three days."

"Sorry, father. Been busy getting acquainted."

"And--?"

Barney thought of the undoubtedly attentive night clerk. "I can't be too explicit"--the connection was blurred for an instant and he repeated the phrase--"for obvious reasons. But the proposition we are considering is wonderful. Remarkable. There should certainly be a reversal of things as they stand. Is that clear?"

"You have what you went for?" Barney realized his father referred to the footprint. "Not yet."

"Well, better hurry. Chloe came in day before yesterday and she was pretty unpleasant about the delay. I headed her off. This morning I called again and Muriel said that she had gone out of town for a day or two. Muriel seemed on edge. Asked what I was procrastinating about. So I advise putting on a little speed. Your ideas so far have been sound and this isn't much more difficult."

"Well--all right, father."

"Bye, son."

"Bye."

Barney went to sleep with a restive sense of guilt. The days had slipped past and he had submerged in them the purpose of his trip to Mayville. It was true that he had met Janet Jamison, but it was equally true that his mind, for some obscure reason, had fought against the consciousness of her alliance to matters of the outer world. He had tried to shut her and himself into the halcyon peace of Mayville and to forget that such peace was subject to interruption or end. The idea, he now perceived, was in its essence unduly possessive. Her attractiveness, the pleasure in her company were inadequate explanations of the attitude. He was falling a little in love with her. He was impatient, almost indignant with the fact of his errand. Nevertheless, he forced himself to think of it.

CHAPTER IX

Dorman's was closed on Saturday afternoon. And on Saturday afternoon, as if by a casual miracle, the entire purpose of Barney's journey was culminated. She telephoned in the morning from the store.

"Hello, Mr. Avery? This is Janet Jamison." Superfluous, he thought, as he listened gladly to the clear, warm voice. "I'm off this afternoon and it occurred to me that we could look at some of the places farther out if we started right after lunch. Father's going to a lodge supper and I thought I'd bring along some sandwiches so we wouldn't have to get back until nine. Would that help you any?"

Would it! "Certainly. I've been wanting to scout the country around Mayville a little before I make up my mind."

He began to put on his clothes, whistling. All afternoon, all evening--together. "I am," he murmured over his lathered face, "a swain at heart. A yokel and a swain. Perhaps a shade toward the oaf. And I thank my Maker that I am."

Mr. Jamison watched his daughter closely while she made the sandwiches. Her hands fluttered and she gave each slice of bread an attention unnecessarily exquisite. "You're pretty fond of this fellow, aren't you?" he said.

"Mr. Avery?" she asked.

"I didn't mean anyone else."

"Well--he's nice." She paused defensively.

Her father chuckled. "Yes--he seems like a mighty nice boy. But he's only here on business and he'll be going a long way off pretty soon. So don't get your little heart wound up in him. You know--he could write a few letters and dwindle off to nothing and you'd never hear of him again--and he'd still be nice."

A far-away look came into her eyes. "I've been thinking about that."

Her father read that expression and turned away. He was old enough to know that the world was not plastic to his wishes and he was kind enough not to scratch it with premature disappointments.

Half past five. She had remembered a spot near a brook where it would be nice to have supper. There was in the behavior of both of them a patent admission of truth: the last hour of driving had been dedicated to the discovery of that spot rather than the search for new lands where the Rittenhouse Company might commence its industry. And all afternoon they had enjoyed the warmth of the sun spread over the growing fields far more than the tabulations of factory site advantages. Flowers were more important than the proximity of adequate water supply and the birds flying above them were more interesting than adjacent land where the homes of employees could be constructed.

Now, in a whispering hardwood glade, with the brook bubbling under the roots of trees and over the smooth pebbles an ancient glacier had dropped in its course, this research was at an end. Janet pushed back her hair and leaned on her elbows. Barney sprawled beside her. The Ford, parked at the side of a wood road, was the only visible intrusion of the outer world. And slowly they went into the background of their thoughts.

"I suppose you'll be going back pretty soon. You've seen nearly everything around Mayville."

"I suppose so."

She was sad then. "And you haven't found anything?"

"What? Oh! I've found a great deal. The--the Rittenhouse Company will certainly do something in Mayville."

"Honestly!" It was more exclamation than question. "Then you'll come back?"

Barney threw a stone into the water. Its swift current obliterated the ripples almost at once. He wanted to take her into his arms and tell her that he was coming back for a reason different from the interests of big business--that there never had been a Rittenhouse Company. He thought abruptly that he did not even know certainly that she was the real Muriel Leigh and he realized at the same time that it did not matter. He picked up a second stone. She was in his employ. She had trusted him with a naive implicitness. He could not betray that trust. It did not occur to him that the generation, the times, the Demar boys had conspired to alienate Mayville girls from the chaperon custom, or that the girls in Mayville had understood and attained a certain emancipation. He preferred the uninterrupted chivalry of his romance.

"I'll probably come back."

"I hope you do."

"Do you? Why?"

"Oh--you're different from most of the boys and men I know. A lot different."

"How?"

She shrugged. "Guess."

"Accent? "

"You mean the way you talk? Yes--that's different." She did not seem satisfied with the conversation. Barney's eyes returned to the water and the clay bank of the brook. He felt equally discontented. He thought of his duty and suddenly he had an idea.

"How would you like to go wading?"

"Wading? Why--that's a swell idea." Janet was standing. "I haven't waded since I was a kid. And it's plenty warm."

The mood of questioning was dispelled--or at least postponed. They took off their shoes and stockings: Barney felt the cool smoothness of the clay bank of the brook under his feet. He rolled up his trousers, took her hand, and walked out into the water gingerly. They went upstream, picking places where the bottom was free of stones, splashing, laughing.

"People," Barney said, "ought to wade every so often. It would soften the conventions."

"And what does that mean?"

"Wading is hard on the dignity but good for the soul."

She looked searchingly at him. His coat was off, his sleeves rolled up, his feet bare. His dark hair was wind-tousled and his eyes were merry. "I suppose you consider that you have dignity?"

"Why not? You should see me in my office in Philadelphia. I can say 'madam' in such a way that it adds years to me. And I can make a clerk shake right out of his shoes."

Janet laughed. "I doubt it. I wish your clerks could see you now. I wish the reporters could see you. 'Philadelphia and New York Business Man Caught by the Camera While Wading with Miss Janet Jamison, Mayville Debutante.'"

"From left to right: Miss Jamison, Mr. Avery, crawfish."

Janet looked down. "Is there a crawfish? I'm terrified at the thought. Let's get out."

"There wasn't any crawfish."

Her expression was dubious. "There might be. I think I'll get out. You would remind me of crawfishes. When I was a little girl I used to pick them up. Now--just thinking about them gives me the creeps." Suddenly she gasped. "There is one. A great big one. It went under the rock." She stood on one foot and then the other. Glancing toward the shore, she saw that it was impossible to step from the brook at that point. Her agitation increased.

Barney eyed the stone she had indicated and near it he did see a small crawfish rapidly scuttling backward. Then he saw two more. After that, it seemed that the place was alive with them. He made half of a chuckle and then he perceived that Janet was really in terror. A moment later he had picked her up and was striding down the brook toward the place where they had started. He forgot the crawfish, because her face was beside his own. With every nerve he realized how light she was, and how soft he set her down on the sloping bank. They stood looking at each other.

The few steps of carrying her had left him with a strange and trembling emotion. But he was startled by the change she had undergone. Her eyes were wide and starry. Her breast rose and fell. She held out her hands in a mute, incomplete gesture. She looked like someone awakened in the midst of a vehement dream. Barney put his arms around her. He held her head in the palm of his hand, his fingers in her hair. He kissed her.

Afterward they sat down quietly on the high, mossy bank. Barney threw another stone. She waited as long as she could. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

"Yes." He faced her solemnly. "I'm crazy about you. I'm crazier about you than I have been about anything in my life. I've thought of nothing else since I saw you. I haven't said it before--because--well--because I gave you a job and it didn't seem fair. If you see what I mean."

She said, "I'm so happy." And she began to cry.

He said, "Don't cry."

She moved close to him, put her arms around him.

Her voice was husky. "Cry? I'm not crying. I don't know what I'm doing. It was like that with me. Probably you think--never mind. I've been kissed before. Many times. Not like this. I--"

Barney, pressed close to her again, found a minute cell of his brain occupied by the

thought that Daisy Storey was the mother of this girl, that proud Jonathan Leigh had loved her mother with a savage integrity and as Barney felt the clear, strong passion that lived in the daughter a new understanding was born in him.

"What'll we do?" she said later. "The world seems wrong. I've been frightened ever since I saw you. I don't know why."

"You're very beautiful," he answered.

"That's the difference in you. Boys around here say, 'Gee, you're a knockout!'"

He smiled. "What will we do? What do people do? Marry."

"Will we?" she asked incredulously.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I've had a feeling we never would."

Barney mussed her hair. "Well, then, exchange it for a feeling that we will." His voice modulated. "The world's a darn peculiar place. And perhaps I know more about it than you do." He thought of her in his arms. "More about the mechanics of it, that is. But I have a feeling that, in the end, you and I are going to carry the memory of this little spot together through years that will astonish us."

"That sounds very impressive."

"You'd never guess what it really means."

An hour later they thought of the sandwiches. And all hour later Janet changed the tenor of their conversation, interjecting a sudden seriousness into the fragrant, singing words. "There's something about me that I've got to tell you. I've been wanting to for a long time."

"What's that?"

"It may make a difference in the way you look at me." She seemed very jealous of that regard.

"Nothing could."

"I suppose not. You probably have a grand family and all that. I could tell by the way you talked about them the other day. And father was only an assistant postmaster. Even that's boasting, because he carried letters first. What I meant was--"

"Was what?"

She struggled with herself for a moment. "Well--he's not my father."

Barney stiffened. So she knew that much about herself. It made him certain, now, that she was Jonathan Leigh's child. He said calmly, "Did you think that would matter?"

"I'm not even related to him. He adopted me."

"And you've been afraid I'd mind that?"

She repulsed his arms gently. "But I haven't any idea who my parents were. Father and mother--that is--Mr. and Mrs. Jamison never had any children. When he was made assistant postmaster, they decided to adopt a child. They went to a sort of agency in Buffalo and got me. Maybe my parents weren't even--"

"Your parents," he interrupted her, "must have been wonderful to have had a child like you. They couldn't be otherwise."

"That's a nice thing to say. But I'm not So wonderful. I have lots of vices."

Barney covered the elaboration of his inner thoughts with amused irony. "Indeed? Opium and absinthe and kleptomania--"

"Silly. But I'm temperamental. And I have days when I just won't do anything. And I was positively stupid in mathematics and--"

"Goodness!" Barney said.

She laughed and she tried to put aside the fact that Barney had frowned thoughtfully when she told him that she was an adopted child. But she had not missed the frown and it troubled her.

They drove home slowly in the gathering twilight. Sound of sleepy birds in the trees above. Touch of the May--wandering wind. Harps playing in heaven, delirium, and a far-away, insistent, syncopated obbligato that remotely keyed the nerves into a tenseness for the unwinding future.

It was late at night while he lay in the luxury of darkness listening to the fascination of small-town night noises that Barney thought of the footprints. He concentrated belligerently. The bank of the brook had been clay--they had washed it off their feet afterward. And there were soft, muddy places. Perhaps one of them might have taken an impression in which the lines would show. Waiting overnight would probably spoil it. The idea of wading had been good. His memory functioned indifferently because every picturization of the setting was instantly submerged by more personal associations. And he had promised to go to church with Janet and her foster father at eleven.

Finally he rose and telephoned to the desk. "Call me at seven, please," he said.

There it was again--the glade in the oak and maple trees. The chattering rivulet, the dappled sunlight--all stripped of her presence and still magical because he could imagine her there. He was shaken by yearning sentiment. The fact that he would see her again in a few hours did not lessen its poignancy. A Sunday hush permeated everything.

He took the photostat from his pocket and walked to the brook edge. There were numerous tracks of bare feet--many of them quite clear. He bent over, realizing suddenly that his suspense was almost insufferable. The small tracks with the high, narrow mound in the center. Admiration was lost in interest.

A few showed faint lines. He chose the best one. He squatted and moved around so that the light fell diagonally. Finally he spread a newspaper he found in the Ford and knelt. Then he could see, quite clearly, the lines that meant a world of difference in Janet's life. For a half hour he studied them, moving from one print to another. He was diverted from his research by the pair that marked the spot where he had set her down. The toes were deep. She had stood that way when he kissed her.

Finally he was satisfied. The method was not ideal, but it was sufficient. There could be no doubt, not the slightest doubt, that Janet Jamison's feet had made the marks that Jonathan Leigh had treasured for twenty years in his safe.

Barney sighed. Almost, yes, actually, he wished that the two imprints had not matched, that Janet was no one but Janet Jamison, a girl into whose life the most shining intrusion would be himself. But it never occurred to him to dissemble. It never occurred to him to consider the fact that he held a scepter over her life. By denying his discovery, he could leave her as she was and launch the Philadelphia Muriel into her career of royal marriage. He sighed again.

The highly colored mental pictures he had made on the way to Mayville were even more brilliant on actual display. The girl in question was beautiful and charming and poor. Realization of the facts would carry with it the rising chords of trembling incredulity, dawning belief, and exaltation. She would be happy. But her happiness would be his increased anxiety. Barney knew Philadelphia. He also knew wealth and its swift, destructive effect even on strong personalities. He knew a hundred girls--beautiful, disillusioned, bitter, hard--because of their class and their

money. The Muriel whom Chloe Laforge-Leigh had sponsored was only one of them. And money, even if Janet could surmount its temptations to the inferior characteristics of human beings, would be but the first factor with which she would have to cope.

There would be snobbery. Despite her charm and the straightforward, lucid education she had gathered, Philadelphia's society was filled with things she did not know. There would be jealousy. And people--people who would hate her from envy and people who would hate her for more cogent reasons--Chloe herself, Muriel, Valak, who would be cheated out of his campaign. In considering the four people most directly connected with the Leigh estate, Barney felt that only the Prince could survive the truth with any grace. And even he would be compelled to break an engagement.

Standing in the shady quiet it was difficult to believe that fury and disaster were silently breeding in the Quaker City. Barney wished that he were a little less introspective. He rolled up the newspaper, tossed it into the stream and watched it bob and pirouette until it vanished.

They sat together in the church. Music of the organ rose and fell, the voices of the congregation following it through the hymns. Barney put a dollar in the collection plate and the usher smiled at him. Heads turned and craned occasionally to look at him. Janet was proud of him and a little shy. She wore a blue dress, blue and floating material. Barney did not know the name of the material but he could call the exact shade to mind ever afterward. He tried to listen to the sermon as it poured in a continual stream from the lips of the minister but he succeeded only in random speculations about his beliefs. He didn't believe that there was a future life. He believed God was merely growing and living. But he did believe in trying to do one's best. In Philadelphia he never went to church; it seemed stodgy, hypocritical, exhibitionary--he could not find the right word. But in Mayville it was pleasant and appropriate. He felt that he would join a church--if he lived there always.

When the service was finished the minister greeted him in the vestibule. "I've seen you on the street, Mr. Avery. Glad the Jamisons brought you here."

"Glad to be here, thank you."

"Going to stay in our town a while?"

"Well--I'm leaving soon--but I'll be back."

"Good." A hearty handshake.

Someone behind him was saying, "Where have you been keeping yourself, Janet? We've been around about ten times." A smiling youth in wide-cut gray trousers and a brown coat. That, Barney thought, was unmistakably the Demar costume. Where there had been one boy six suddenly appeared, all importuning Janet. She laughed and took Barney's arm, introducing by first names. The boys were diffident. Barney wondered if it was his clothes, or the fact that he was older.

"And now you're coming home for dinner."

They walked along Alexander Street. Mr. Jamison was behind them, telling a deaf and cane-supported old gentleman about his eternal bees. Janet squeezed his arm. "Happy?"

"I'm dizzy with happiness."

"Me--I'm scared."

"Why?"

"This is the first time you ever ate anything I cooked. The way to a man's heart, you know--and if something burned, I'd die."

In a month or two, he reflected, she would be telling a butler what to tell the cook to prepare. Preposterous thought!

"What are you laughing at?"

"Me? You."

Roast chicken, started, she said, in the fireless cooker and finished in the oven. Raised biscuits and gravy. Mashed potatoes, butter-crowned. Carrots, peas, jelly she had made. Strawberries that bled crimson into thick cream.

In the afternoon he said, "I've got to go back."

Her face fell. "For how long, Barney?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps a week."

"A week! That's terribly long."

"My thought exactly."

"I suppose it will end--"

"In a week."

She smiled. "Then let's get your Ford and take a long ride."

"Swell! But--won't your father disapprover"

"Because it's Sunday? I don't think so. In the first place, he indulges me a good deal. In the second, he thinks you're grand. And in the third, he's much more philosophical than religious. He argues terribly with the minister sometimes."

Her hair had been mussed, not altogether by the motion of the car and there was in her eyes an expression that could not be ascribed to the thrill of fast driving over country roads. "You know, every year at High School a woman used to come and lecture to us about morals. The main thing she said," Janet looked at him with mock reproach, "was to beware of strange men from the cities. They loved and left, was the burden of her story. Somehow, I don't believe her."

"My fine face assures you that, at no matter what cost, I shall return."

"Like Lochinvar."

"Going in the wrong direction."

"Don Quixote, then."

He laughed. Presently they were serious again. "Has your family very much money?" It was direct. No one would have dared it in Philadelphia.

"Not so much," he answered.

"But you must--building factories, and all."

"Oh--the company has money."

"Do you think your people will like me?"

Barney knew the answer to that. "Mother will adore you. And Father will pound my back until I drop." She leaned against him. "Gee, I hope so. All but the dropping."

"What--" and he looked steadily in her eyes--"what would you do if you did have a lot of money?"

"You mean--all my own? Thousands of dollars?"

"Millions. "

"I don't know. I'd be scared somebody would rob me, I guess." They talked about her father. "If we ever do get married--" she said.

"When--"

"Well--when, then--we'll have to do something about father."

"Sure. Bring him to live with us."

She shook her head. "That would be nice of you. But he'd hate the city."

"I know. There's a place he could have in the country right outside Philadelphia. He could raise more bees than there are anywhere else on earth."

Perhaps Barney was thinking of his father's country place--or perhaps of the broad and majestic acres of Leigh.

"You seem a little bit depressed," she said.

"Kiss me again, then."

"This is the first time I ever heard of anyone parking in broad daylight."

"The road's empty."

"Well--"

The night clerk handed his key and a telegram to Barney. The wire was from his father, and evidently a reply to his of that morning which told about the footprints. It said:

"Return immediately and bring girl. Inform of situation."

Barney stood with the yellow sheet in his hand. The country idyll was ended, then. He realized that there was no other way out. Janet must know before the newspapers all over the country resounded with her name. It would be hard to tell Janet. And suddenly he perceived a dreadful thing: she might, she almost certainly would believe that he had made love to her because of the money she was going to inherit!

Stunned, numb with apprehension, he stumbled toward a chair. The thing was simple. He had been so quick to admire, so ready with a scheme for acquaintance--which would now prove to be false. On the face of it, she could give no other interpretation to his actions. He would have to tell her that she was rich. He would have next to tell her that he had deceived her. He would have to make it clear that he knew all the time she was going to be rich. Then--the love he offered would seem ignominious, scheming, mean. Only the greatness and integrity of his feeling for her could have made him blind to so obvious and terrible a fact. But in the staggering realization of the appearance of his behavior, she would be humanly compelled to overlook the evidence of anything deeper.

At four in the morning Barney was still walking.

He had walked all night, cursing himself, his stupidity, cursing fate which led him to meet love by giving him the tidings which would strangle it. He was angry and dramatic in the dawn. He stalked and muttered. His feelings leaked through his muscles and more acid feelings rose to take their place. He could see her, proud and aching. He could see himself, proud and silent. Neither of them could behave in any other manner.

Day came. Pale and hollow-eyed he sat in an early-opened restaurant drinking coffee. "Another cup," he said. And another. He was unconscious of fatigue. How she would despise him.

She would go to Philadelphia. They would ride side by side on the train, unspeaking. Or perhaps she would not even ride with him. "Maybe you did like me a little," she would say. "But you came to get my money. How can I believe anything else? If you didn't--then why did you make love to me first and tell me afterward? City men! Even that fool lecturer knew something!"

While he sat in the restaurant, staring wretchedly through the lettered plate-glass window, he discovered one single idea which gave him relief. Mr. Jamison might understand. Faint hope rose in him. For Mr. Jamison was a philosopher. He knew people and he understood them. If he went to Mr. Jamison and told him in detail just what had occurred, perhaps he would win a helpful ally against the dark hours ahead.

He glanced at his watch. In an hour Janet would go to business. Then he would call at her

house and talk with her foster father. He went to his hotel room and spent the time changing his clothes and shaving with nervous hands. He smoked parts of eleven cigarettes. Then he started down the street.

There was a limousine in front of the Jamison house. For a puzzled instant Barney's weary mind realized only that it was familiar. Someone in it. Motor running--he could hear it faintly at that distance. The gears meshed and it moved forward toward him. He remembered and he saw simultaneously. A chauffeur. Inside, Chloe Laforge-Leigh and Janet! Their heads were bent together in earnest conversation and she did not see him as he stopped, his face frozen. He half waved. He swung around as if he were going to chase the car.

Then he walked weakly toward the house. Mr. Jamison was leaning on the fence looking in the direction the limousine had taken.

CHAPTER X

To most American eyes Europe is Paris and London. It is a bright succession of sidewalk cafés, monocles, mustaches, sidelong glances from mysterious ladies, with a cathedral obtruding its spires here and there. Berlin, in the American mind, may exist nebulously as a smell of beer and frankfurters. But Sabria, or any similar principality, has no being. Even the news reels fail to convey its actuality. Its armies, its fertile fields and lofty mountains, the slightly barbaric splendor of its pre-war court belong to limbo from which they emerge in newspaper items skipped for cartoons and occurrences of domestic interest.

A Frenchman would know a good deal about Sabria. An Englishman would know a little--although he would not commit himself on his knowledge. But a citizen of the United States would be blithely ignorant. In 1914 the Balkan barometer meant nothing. In 1930 Prince Rupert, Valak, Duke of Lower Sabria, and the lesser titles of their retinue appearing frequently in the newspapers meant very little more. As titles they were accepted calmly and except for a few persons like Chloe who had devoted years to integrating the variations of European royal blood, and possibly a dozen diplomats, it occurred to no one that Rupert's progenitors had followed Attila to the sack of Rome or that the Pope himself had retired to Sabria in the remote eleven hundreds.

The Sabrians themselves, however, were adequately conscious of their ancient glories. Valak, who represented the kingdom and who faithfully and perhaps rightly believed that its future depended on his activities, was unflinchingly motivated by that consciousness. It welled up in him whenever he permitted himself an hour of daydreaming repose. He could see that the world was changing, but he did not approve of change. He was dismayed by the indifference of Rupert toward his accession. He was terrified by the infiltration of republican ideas and bolshevistic agitations in Sabria. He was sufficiently practical to realize that the feeble financial position of the royal exchequer was in a large way responsible for the condition.

His satisfaction at the settlement made upon his daughter by Jonathan Leigh was great. Now, however, Leigh was dead. Muriel would inherit the bulk of his fortune immediately. The Duke gave scant attention to the inward compunctions of mourning: Sabria would be the sooner cured for that demise.

His elation endured for several days. Rupert was behaving with grace and dignity. Muriel was no more taciturn than usual. Chloe was eager to consummate the marriage. He foresaw that,

by autumn, he could carry back to his country a royal couple certain to be popular, a huge fortune, and a hope for the return of the old order. In those days while Jonathan Leigh was being carried to his resting place he planned the first steps of Sabria's reorganization and rejuvenation. A lean and wolfish old man surrounded by his staff articulating the tracteries of his imagination with a long, monotonously scratching quill pen.

Dissonances, restiveness were born slowly in him. His catholic education had not supplied him with the details of American law. He did not know when to expect the reading of the will. But his knowledge of people commenced to make insinuations. A fugitive agitation removed some of the saccharine from Chloe's behavior. Douglas Avery had not called on him and refused to talk to him on the telephone. Valak realized that both persons harbored some misgiving about the future.

For a day or two he puzzled over it. Had Leigh failed to make his fortune over to Muriel? Had he, perhaps, left the bulk of it to some gigantic and typically American philanthropy? Or was there some hitch, some attachment in the affairs of his estate? Whatever it was, Chloe had some inkling. Valak finally decided to go to her. The mission was more difficult than he had imagined.

Superficially it was an ordinary call embellished with the formality of the downstairs living room and tea brought by Severance instead of the maid. Actually it was a crescendo of apprehensions, a sort of weaponless duel in which he fought for a monarchy and she for the tottering cause of her own old spites and jealousies.

It began with the insipidities he had learned to expect. Chloe was dressed in black georgette. It made an aggressive monument of her. Valak wore afternoon clothes and a single bronze decoration. She was delighted to see him. She hoped his health had not suffered from the strain they were all undergoing. Mrs. Westover had called the day before to say that Jonathan represented so much of old Philadelphia to her that she felt like going into mourning as a generic symbol of sympathy. To her, Chloe, it seemed the simpering sacrilege of a woman whose social if not physical lusts had survived the uses of decency.

The weather had been so beautiful, so sadly beautiful, Chloe said. And the Duke replied that he thought a dreary meteorological aspect would have been inappropriate for the passing of a Leigh. "Although"--Chloe sighed--"the Laforges were really the ones who came from a sunny land. Virginia, you know. Old Virginia."

"Of course, of course." Valak put his fingertips together. "We are the ones who must sit in silent reverence. It is always so. The young go on. Look at our charming couple. They are properly subdued, yet the knowledge of the approach of their hour is always in their eyes."

"Certainly," Chloe said suspiciously.

He nodded several times. "Yes, indeed. They will be forging ahead. Married. King and Queen before long. Building a new empire."

"I shall feel almost"--Chloe hesitated impressively--"like the Queen Mother."

"And it is as that very person that Sabria will receive you."

Chloe's hand caressed the gray pile of her hair. A coronet might some day be imbedded there. A small one, with diamonds. She returned her attention to Valak.

"A small point, my dear Miss Laforge-Leigh. Small indeed. But the exigencies of my own curiosity urge me to ask. The will is to be read soon, I expect?"

He did not miss the slight tokens of nervousness. "Soon, I believe. I have requested Mr. Avery--"

"Yes?" Her eyes avoided his. "To have everything ready--very soon."

Her manner did not reassure him. On the contrary, it made obvious the fact that there was some impediment of which she was aware. It hinted that she knew the nature of the impediment. It showed her unwillingness to meet a direct question. He took immediate advantage of that unwillingness.

"You are, of course, aware of the nature of the legacy?"

"Oh, yes."

"It is quite in order? I mean to say--although I dislike to mention such a thing at this time--it is necessary for me, as the Prince's envoy--to keep informed of the progress of material matters. I have been at some pains, I have made some concessions with myself, in order to consummate your niece's happiness and I feel duty-bound--"

"Naturally." Chloe plucked at the arm of her chair. "I can assure you that everything will be satisfactory. "

Fears were swarming through her and their shadows snowed in her face. She knew one thing which no one else on earth must ever know--and already the procrastination of the lawyers had frightened her. Already her nights were dreadful with the terror of what they might already guess.

"More tea, Severance," she said.

Valak pressed his point with a lie. "Miss Laforge-Leigh, you may feel free to confide in me. The truth is that I have already learned from outside sources that everything relevant to the will is not quite as it should be."

He had meant to torment her. He was successful. Chloe could flush with rage; rarely, she could grow pale. Now her color receded.

"You have talked with Avery?" She hoped it was true. She hoped that from Valak she might find out the reason for the delay. It might not be what she feared.

"Perhaps. Now, you must really tell me all you know about this business. My end is the same as yours. I cannot be expected to carry out this--ah--mission--if I must proceed without your coöperation."

Chloe's composure was studious. "Really, I don't understand. Perhaps if you told me Mr. Avery's difficulties--I might be able to explain them in the light of my knowledge of Jonathan's affairs."

She was very nearly successful in stopping him at that point. He had not been able to talk with Avery. He had no knowledge, no clue to any knowledge. He was acting on an intuition. But, again, it was his understanding of people and especially of Chloe that extracted fact from the situation.

He rose and walked across the room, his face speculative. Then he turned back to her sharply. "You realize perfectly well, Miss Laforge-Leigh, that there can be a serious obstacle in the way of our plans for Rupert and Muriel."

It was not a question, but a statement. Chloe's involuntary gasp chilled him. There was an obstacle. Now he would have to discover it. Slowly, with the malignant precision of an inquisitor, he drew his chair up to face her and still more slowly he sat in it. He leaned forward and almost whispered.

"What are we going to do about it?"

She sat still, hypnotized, quivering. From far away came the sound of falling, the gentle rumble that might begin the avalanche of her life. If she told him--her soul recoiled at the thought--she might win an ally against the troubles in store. If she did not tell him, the days of slow misery, of startled imagining might go on until the truth burst into light or until the lawyers were

satisfied and their mysterious silence was favorably ended.

Had she known that Barney was in Mayville she would not have hesitated. Had she known that Muriel had been foot printed at Avery's office she would have been in the thick of scheming. But now she was faced with a clash merely of persons, with the nebulous countenance of Valak's impatience. Valak rose again.

"Perhaps the Prince and I had better withdraw before it is too late. Engagements--even royal engagements--are not yet marriages."

Chloe drew a long, shuddering breath. "I can't say--"

Valak was bowing. His last card had been played. The dimly lighted suspicion of irregularity in the will or in something that pertained to the will was a bright flame now. He bowed very slowly, so that she would realize the coronet was receding, the dreams of nobility were growing dim.

"Pride," Chloe began tremulously, "has always been my greatest fault."

Valak returned to the chair. It was over. He would hear presently. He was soothing. "We all have pride, my dear Miss Laforge-Leigh. It is the thing that elevates us above the beasts."

Two large tears swamped her opaque eyes. "You are so understanding." She sucked in another breath. "A long time ago," she began, "I took a step which seemed very necessary. I believe it was the right step. I think you will agree."

Valak inclined his head, innocent of that to which he was agreeing. "The one bitter blow to my life was Jonathan's marriage to a vulgar person." He nourished the confession with another nod.

"I could not bear to think that our line would be preserved through the veins of--British peasants."

"Quite so."

She tried to read his face but could not. She assumed that it was sympathetic. "So--" the clock in the corner filled the interval with rhythmic punctuation--"so--when the child--her child--was born I--I--I secured another offspring--a suitable one from the Laforge family in France--and substituted it. I think you will agree that it was the only thing to do. I--" Chloe's confession had ended. She was master of herself again. She tinkled the tea bell. "Severance," she said to the butler, "bring the Duke some brandy and water."

Valak waited for the drink, damp sweat on his brow. He poured the gurgling liquor into his glass and drained it. When he spoke his voice was shrill and high. There was, incredibly, laughter in it. A dreadful voice.

"So that's all it is. Really nothing, my dear lady. Nothing. Nothing at all. Ha-ha. Ho-ho. A trifle."

"Your Grace!"

He stiffened at the reprimand. His haggard face was thrust toward her plump nose and yielding chins. "You fool! And that is what our good friend the attorney has discovered."

Chloe shrank back. "No. Oh, no. There is no evidence. None."

"The perfect criminal," he said mirthlessly. "I am going. I am going before we become the joke of the whole world. Tell me about it."

She was prim. "I think not. You are intoxicated. If that is the way you are going to treat me after all the effort I've made, drunken badinage, then I refuse."

"Forgive me. The result of--ah--my natural surprise. It is too late, I am afraid, but perhaps--"

"Your Grace, there is no evidence. Had I not put a real Laforge in the place of Daisy

Storey's infant, this could never be. Do not sneer. I mean that her imbecilic child would never do as the bride of a prince. Muriel--is different." She began the story of her deed. She described the death of Daisy Storey, her stay in France, the search she had made for a substitute child after the scheme had possessed her. The finding of an orphan from the Laforge stem. The return voyage. The adroit disposition of the real heiress through a Buffalo foundling home. "You see? They cannot know. Cannot discover."

Valak had listened with a strange expression on his face. It was composed of disgust, or disappointment, of speculation. When she finished, he began to question her.

"The father never suspected?"

"He was too crazed by grief--foolish under the circumstances since his wife's death was God's hand and blessing. He never noticed the child until she was three or four."

"And the real child still lives? "

"In Mayville, Ohio, under the name of Jamison."

"Why do the lawyers hesitate with the will, then?"

Chloe's answer was more effective than she could know. "One does not relinquish lightly many millions of dollars. Or even the stewardship of them."

"No," Valak said thoughtfully.

For five minutes he said nothing. Chloe fidgeted. Twice she cleared her throat and began to speak but a glance stopped her. Once she sighed as if fresh tears were imminent, but a different look dammed them back.

"It may be possible," he said finally, "to save this situation. Only possible. Not probable. But, as you said, one does not relinquish lightly--" He shrugged. "If this were Sabria, now--the matter would be simple. A judicious removal here and there. Perhaps Avery would be susceptible to some sort of compromise-if he were adequately recompensed--"

Chloe's single word fumed through his spoken thoughts. "Ridiculous."

He waved his hand. "As you say, ridiculous. Men such as Avery are ridiculous. There are too many of them in this country. Friendship. Duty. Self-sacrifice. Faugh! One thing, however, is most evident. The girl in Ohio must be--" He snapped his fingers.

Chloe stirred from her melancholy. "Be what?"

"Oh, we will be cautious about the method. It is a task my Sabrian boys will execute nicely. Execute. A good word there. With the primal cause out of the way, my dear Miss Laforge-Leigh, our case becomes automatically much simpler. In fact, that is to my mind a solution. It leaves Avery without an alternative, regardless of his suspicions and even supposing they carry him at last to this town in Ohio. What does he find? There was a girl. She is no more. Hence he must be content with the visible heiress."

Her voice was querulous. "You can't just kidnap people in this country."

He smiled. "Not kidnap. An automobile accident, let us say. A fire that burns her house. Something of that kind."

Chloe had not until then realized the cold completeness of his intent. She was still unable to credit its seriousness. "Also ridiculous. That would be murder."

The smile did not leave his face and scarcely altered. "An unpleasant word. Murder. We have a cause that justifies some--ah--slight activity of the law of survival."

Then she was frightened. "You can't do such a thing. It means the gallows."

His lips locked. His eyes traveled into the distance. "I have performed a good many such acts in my life. For smaller reasons than this. And I have never felt the halter draw."

Something greater than fear or indignation moved Chloe. She spoke haughtily. "You are

in America now, Your Grace."

"True. It does not change me."

"I will not hear any more of such a thing. It's monstrous."

Valak occupied a few moments with the business of lighting an overlong cigarette. He began to talk casually, with an undercurrent of biting sarcasm. "No? You are quite willing to cheat a helpless baby of the benefits of wealth, of a good name, of a fortune. You are ready, even feel it your duty, to steal everything but life from an infant, to reduce it to nothing. But your wit is so cloyed with the nonsense of republican idealism that it sticks at doing the whole thing--quickly, mercilessly, painlessly. It is kinder to kill than to desecrate, to condemn. But you are an American. Moreover, it is better to permit one peasant from your Middle West to enjoy the dubious fruits of her provincial and silly life than it is to retain your own reputation, your self-respect, your position in the community, the majesty of the Laforge name, the whole future of this French relative of yours--her love, marriage, ascendancy to a throne--I refer to Muriel, it is better than it is to save an ancient and brilliant line from an extermination more sure and--terrible than death, better above everything than to save an empire. To preserve one petty soul you would damn thousands. There's logic for you."

Chloe's broad bosom rose and fell. In the mingling of silences that followed that heated passage, fiercely said because of its very urbanity and quietness, she felt her reason tottering. All that he had told her was true. A few days of dull worry had led sharply to this tragic climax. There was no recourse. She must choose between this and disgrace--but disgrace was the one great anathema of her life and belief. She would condone the overthrow of every man-made law to avoid disgrace. Except murder. Chloe had never thought of murder.

The way she chose was temporizing and pitiful. "I would never be a party to such a thing."

"Ah!" Valak said. There was lightness, uplift, in the accent he gave it. "Why should you think of it? Such things are not for women. I might better have left it unmentioned. I spoke from inspiration. Perhaps from necessity. It was direct. When things are so arranged that even if this girl is located she will not be--the case will rest. The danger will be gone. Yes--I think I can continue this suit of Rupert's--even accept this new condition. One does not lightly relinquish the hold of millions. You spoke accurately. And now I must be going--"

Chloe spoke from a sudden dread of being left alone with her thoughts. "Please don't think of going. There is so much more to say. We must think. There may be another way--"

"I think not." He rose, quenched his cigarette in an ash tray, bowed. "Good afternoon, Miss Laforge-Leigh."

"But--Your Grace--"

At the portieres he turned. "Rest calmly," he said. There was a mocking note in the suggestion.

Chloe's imagination was powerful, although it was conditioned entirely by the Victorian bias of her girlhood. Without such an imagination she could never have conceived and enacted the original plan which placed a false daughter in the Leigh mansion. When she had completed that great coup, her fancy had fed itself on less vehement and exciting fare. If anyone had accused her of giving Muriel a direction toward noble marriage for self-aggrandizement, her denial would have been harsh and vicious. Yet Chloe, while she reared the child with that object in mind, had evolved strange dreams from her dog-eared Almanach de Gotha, dreams in which she occupied a prominent place in castle gardens and at state functions.

It was a particular irony that turned those imaginings to another and more vivid channel in the very hour when they neared consummation. She had said a thousand times to Jonathan Leigh, while he lived, and as many to Muriel, that she hated the newspapers because they carried the burden of so much evil. She had loudly eschewed interest in all but the society pages. Yet never a detail of a hanging, an electrocution, a sanguinary prizefight, a murder, a disaster under the sea or down in the mines had escaped the secret fascination of her febrile eye.

Now these things came back to her. Gloom gathered in the room on Rittenhouse Square and thickly padded the noises from the street. A wraith of Severance collected the tea things and scarcely marked itself for the great figure sitting in the chair. In the gathered murk her imagination began to draw a grisly pageant from its unconscious store. She could depict clearly the circumstances that would presently involve Janet Jamison. She could hear the wooden house crackle as the flames rose; she could smell the smoke; she could see the body writhe and char as the fire licked the chloroform from it and it became horribly conscious of the ropes that bound it to the bed. She even saw that they would not be ropes, but wires--to make all hope of salvation fruitless.

Again, she could see the girl decoyed to the roadside--the swift charge of the lethal car, the scream, the blood on the fender, the bundle that did not look human. This malignant incubus took a new form.

There was some flaw in Valak's machination. The kindly face of Douglas Avery was screwed into the countenance of relentless revenge. There was the mummer's syllable of suspicion, the heat and sweat of third degree, the hysterical implication of herself. Then the ghastly sibilances of courtrooms under roofs of stone. She would be proud and silent. Perhaps she would not have the courage. There would come, finally, the verdict. Then the singeing, spasmodic jelly of her own huge bulk.

Chloe shivered and swallowed. She thought of telephoning to Valak. But even now he might be on his way to Mayville. Even now. She turned on the light and chased the fancies into far corners, but they did not leave the room. The dinner bell sounded. She sat in the spacious dining chamber and watched the invisible furies that circled over the tasteless food. When the meal was ended she thought that soon she would be going to bed. To bed. *To sleep! Perchance to dream.*

"Send for the chauffeur," she said to Severance.

He came in. His uniform was reassuring. Her crystallizing purposes were more so. "How far is it to Columbus, Ohio?"

"I'm not quite sure, ma'am."

"Could we get there before morning?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Get ready to go at once."

CHAPTER XI

When she walked up on the Jamison porch, breathless and hollow-eyed, she saw them through the window. Valak had not yet acted. She was immediately grateful to some dim and uncomprehended God and then, for a moment, incredulous of the actuality of her motives in going to Mayville. Mr. Jamison puzzled over the familiarity of her face, recognized her across

twenty years, greeted her with polite alacrity, introduced Janet and thanked her immediately for the annual hundred dollars which Janet had received.

"She's grown up, you see. So good of you to be interested in my daughter. I'd almost forgotten you. Amazingly kind of a stranger to be so faithful to a mite that has no parents. Haven't been in Buffalo since that day twenty years ago. No. Sit in the parlor. You'd probably like some coffee. Janet makes fine coffee. We can give you some honey, too. Raise it myself. It seems to me that bees are about as--"

Janet's frown intercepted him. Chloe was escorted to the parlor. Once, when a car passed in the street outside she bent nervously toward the window. None of its occupants could be considered a Sabrian. Jamison continued to talk. Chloe nodded in a lordly way, puffed, and thought about what she would say. She was finally given a chance.

"Just happen to be passing through?" he asked.

Chloe unfolded her story while she drank coffee. "No. I came out just to see you. I have some news for you. There's a chance that your daughter may inherit a sum of money from-ah-an old estate. Only, I'll need to have her in Philadelphia right away if it is to go through. I could drive her back. Pm sure you wouldn't mind if I took her for a few days."

Janet and her father were looking at each other with half-credulous and half-incredulous expressions. "You mean--you've found out that I have--a family?" Janet asked in a hushed voice. Chloe nodded.

Jamison looked out at the car and back at the girl. His eyes filled. Janet understood. "I wouldn't leave you, daddy." She looked anxiously at Chloe. "They aren't alive--are they?"

"No," Chloe said. "Just an estate."

Jamison's face was radiant then. He cleared his throat. "Just--if you don't mind and I'm not too inquisitive--well--how much would it come to?"

"About five thousand dollars," Chloe said. She ignored the double gasp. "But I'll have to be going right away. Now. I--I will need you there at once."

Janet thought of Barney. Perhaps that had been her first thought when she realized that there was a possibility of locating her family. He would not have to accept the burden of her unknown birth. She wanted desperately to tell him. And he, too, was going to Philadelphia.

"Couldn't I follow you on the train today?" She could go with Barney! What a surprise it would be to him.

But Chloe was in terror of every passing instant. "I'm afraid not. We will try to get back ahead of the train."

"It'll save carfare," Jamison said gently.

They considered briefly and Chloe repeated the need of haste. Janet had been eating a quiet breakfast. Then suddenly she was in her room filling a battered suitcase with her clothes. Five thousand dollars was more important than Mr. Dorman's store. Bona fide parents were worth still more than money. She wrote a note to Barney:

"Darling--I'm going to Philadelphia. A lady who helped manage my adoption has located the estate or my family. Think of it! I really had a mother and father! And they left me five thousand dollars! I'll call you up in the big city tomorrow. Love and kisses. Janet."

She entrusted the note to her father. She kissed him, and ran back from the porch to kiss him again. The chauffeur took her bag. The car started. She did not see Barney when he walked up the street.

He took the note from Mr. Jamison's fingers and read it. He glanced at Mr. Jamison who

was still staring in the direction the car had taken.

"Darn it, they use those contraptions just like trains. Imagine figuring on getting to Philadelphia this afternoon--by road!"

"What?" Barney said.

"Isn't that fine news, my boy? She'd have waited sure if she had guessed you were coming here. She figured you'd say good-bye at lunch time."

Barney read the note again. "What's the trouble?" Jamison asked. "Aren't you glad?"

Barney nodded. No use in telling Mr. Jamison that things were not what they seemed to be. His mind was trying feverishly to decide just why Chloe had kidnaped Janet and just what she would do with the girl. Hide her? Probably.

He asked a question. "Did Janet say anything to Miss Laforge-Leigh about me?"

Jamison was startled. "You know that lady?"

"I know who she is. Never mind. Did she?"

The older man shook his head. "She didn't. And I don't imagine she will. She's not the kind that prattles about private affairs. But how does it happen you know her?"

Barney shrugged. "Oh--she lives in Philadelphia."

"Will you come in?"

Barney shook his head. "No thanks, not now. I've got to tag along. I'll see you soon, however."

Mr. Jamison watched Barney go. "Something," he said to himself, "something peculiar in the way he behaved. I wonder--"

Barney went to the garage on Toledo Street and secured the Ford. He turned the car east and opened it wide. In an hour he was on the Lincoln Highway. He had forgotten to pay his hotel bill. He had neglected to pack his clothes. On his face was a stubble of beard. He had not slept for twenty-four hours.

His single intention was to catch Chloe before she reached Philadelphia. He realized his chances were small because Chloe's car was so much more powerful than his own, but he thought that once she had taken Janet beyond the boundary of Mayville she might feel sufficiently safe to relax not only her own vigilance but also the pace of the automobile.

The thought that Chloe had kidnaped Janet--for Barney assumed that it was a species of kidnapping--might have a variety of meanings but the most probable meaning was that Chloe intended to get Janet out of reach and keep her out of reach until after the reading of the Leigh will: As Barney drove he considered the result of that move if it were successful. It could not completely block his father and himself since they had ascertained that Janet was Jonathan Leigh's heiress but it could make trouble for them. Perhaps Janet would tell Chloe about himself and perhaps she would not. If she did Chloe would be thoroughly armored in her struggle to protect the false claims of Muriel.

The greatest danger, however, was Valak. Barney knew that Valak was an unscrupulous man and a man at the moment involved in a great crisis. He had a sketchy idea of Sabrian politics and Sabrian methods. It was conceivable that if Chloe reached Philadelphia ahead of him and turned Janet over to the Duke, anything might become of the girl. Barney's mind was matter-of-fact and yet, because of his intense and sudden feeling for Janet, matter-of-factness departed from him. He could imagine Janet murdered so that her murder appeared to be an accident. He could think of her disappearing into that sinister limbo which claims annually a certain number of young and beautiful girls. The conception made him grow icy with terror.

His foot pushed the accelerator flat against the floor boards. The road behind him was

strewn with dismayed pedestrians and drivers. He ate up the miles recklessly. His hat blew off and he did not even know it was gone. His necktie whipped out behind him. The morning sun rose higher. The engine hummed at a hysterical pitch.

Barney shot crazily through a series of small towns. He almost collided with a huge van. He killed a chicken. His tires chattered when he turned corners. Only the utmost emergency brought about the scream of brakes. At a town called Waterville he was compelled to stop for gasoline. While his tank was being filled by an attendant whom he had spurred to haste he asked a brief question.

"Seen a big black limousine--Pennsylvania license--chauffeur in uniform--old woman and a young woman in the back seat?"

The attendant considered. "You mean today?"

"This morning," Barney snapped.

"Oh, this morning, let me see. Y eh, heading east and going fast."

Barney was chilled.

"Going fast, eh?" He jumped into his Ford and handed two dollars to the attendant.

"Going fast," he repeated and put the car in gear.

In the larger towns he was glad he had a small car. It made better time in traffic. More than once he disobeyed the signal of a red light. In at least two towns irate policemen blew futile whistles to stop him. Toward noon it occurred to him that Chloe would undoubtedly stop for luncheon. It would give him a chance because Barney was not going to eat any luncheon. The country became hilly; the engine grew hot. He could feel the heat blown through the ventilators in the hood and into the car. He could feel it on the floorboards, but the engine ran. Occasionally he wondered what he would do when and if he overtook them. That would depend largely on the circumstances. He would get in front of the limousine and compel it to stop, wrecking the Ford if necessary. But above all things he thought of the absolute necessity of intercepting Chloe before she reached Philadelphia and Valak.

He lost all sense of time. He knew dimly that the sun was shining but his mind became hypnotized by the road--straight road, curved road, smooth road, rough road, road that swung to the left, road that turned abruptly to the right, road that shot through fields, road that poured itself into valleys, road that rose over the tops of hills, road that ran beneath the wheels of his car like the belt on some engine of perpetual motion.

At another town, the name of which he never learned, a stop for oil was necessitated. The oil flowed into the car with unendurable slowness.

Barney asked this question: "Seen a black limousine, chauffeur--two women?"

"Nope."

"Just prop that oil can so it won't fall out. Here's five dollars."

Again he put the car in gear. The oil can poured more than half of its contents into the proper place before it tipped over. The rest of the oil flowed into the drip pan and presently the can was shaken onto the running board and into the road. The engine hood was up but a considerable bump dropped it back in its place where it rattled furiously because it was not hooked down. Barney scarcely noticed.

Shadows on the road were lengthened. Distant hills were changing color. His mind was a confusion of instantaneous anticipations and memories of cities and buildings and bridges and countrysides.

Then far ahead shooting up a long steep grade he saw a black limousine. There had been many other black limousines, many moments of high hope which became disappointments as

Barney passed at a perilous speed and saw that either the license was not Pennsylvania or that the people were not Chloe and Janet. Some inner function of his mind told him that here was the right car. He could not increase his speed because the Ford was already doing its best but he held it grimly to that pace.

When he had first seen the car it was perhaps a mile away. In five miles he gained half the distance. In ten he had cut it to a few hundred yards. The limousine ahead emerged on a straight stretch and Barney followed it. Yard by yard he decreased the space between himself and the other car. The sound of his passage was altered as they shot over a culvert. The car ahead had slowed a little bit for it and Barney saw in one second that its license was Pennsylvania and in the next, through a rear window, he had a glimpse of what was unmistakably the profile of Chloe. He put his hand on the horn and sounded it furiously. Then he stopped. If they turned around and recognized him Chloe would merely tell the chauffeur to go faster and the big car would get away from him. As it was, by some demon of perversity, the chauffeur increased his speed enough so that all Barney could do for the time being was to hang on. His brain was whirling. His heart was fairly bursting, and then trouble beset him. From behind came a silvery blast and an underslung roadster shot past him and took the position in front of him, waiting for a chance to go by Chloe's car. Then for some reason the people in the roadster slowed. The road became tortuous and Barney could not pass them. He saw that they were all taking drinks from a silver flask. He blew his horn for the right of way and the man turned his head and grinned. With deliberate but playfully intended malice the driver of the roadster swung it into the middle of the road so that Barney could not get ahead of them. Under his breath Barney cursed bitterly. He would have been happy to beat the humorous driver to a pulp. Blocking the road became a game for the people ahead--a game which they played with jeers and laughter and which Barney played desperately. They cut the pace in half. Chloe's car had gone out of sight.

Five minutes later by driving into a precarious shoulder of the road Barney succeeded in getting ahead of the roadster but he held his lead only for a few moments. On the next straightaway it caught up with him and the silvery horn sounded again. This time Barney, going at top speed, blocked the roadster but either the driver was drunk and did not care or else he was angry that he had been passed before because using his full advantage of many miles an hour additional speed and taking a senseless chance, he flung his car completely off the road, along a cinder drive past the front of a filling station and back on the road fifty feet ahead of Barney, who was compelled to put on his brakes to avoid a collision. The game began again. In the roadster were two men and a girl. The driver kept looking back at him and grinning and making disdainful gestures. The other man and the girl turned around and laughed at him. They interpreted his intense and grim expression merely as annoyance at the trick they had played on him and not as what it was--a combination of despair and crimson hatred.

He never knew how long he fought that duel for right of way on the road. He only knew that every minute of it was making the chase more difficult. Lochinvar ran his steed no more urgently and certainly no more dexterously than Barney ran the flying Ford. His one hope now became that since neither Chloe nor Janet had seen him they might stop for dinner and he would catch them. Simultaneously with that hope came a new fear. If they stopped in a city or if they turned off on a side street he would miss them. His only chance then would be to reach Philadelphia first and to send out an alarm for Janet so that the arrival of the limousine would be discovered by the police.

It began to grow dark. Barney turned on his lights. It would be impossible to drive quite as fast at night as he had driven in the daylight, but what was left of his rational mind felt there

would be a compensation in the lessened traffic.

He was hurtling through a hilly farming country, miles from any town, when a tire blew out. He stopped the car. For one moment he wanted to sit down on the running board and weep. Then furiously he began to change the tire and it was only after he had changed it that he realized how much more quickly electricity moved than automobiles. The thought stunned him. He had taken the entire responsibility on himself. He had thought of no one else, relied upon no one else but himself. Now, with a new tire in place of the one which had gone to pieces under hours of furious turning, he began to watch for a place from which he could telephone. He found a booth. He waited impatiently while change was made so he could call. He gave the number of his Philadelphia home. His mother's voice answered. When he asked for his father she told him she did not know where he could be found.

Barney replied breathlessly. "Get hold of him the minute you can. Tell him that the girl in Mayville was kidnapped this morning by Chloe. She is on the road heading toward Philadelphia and I am on the road behind her. Have the Lincoln Highway watched for her car as well as her house and put somebody on Valak's trail and don't let Valak and Chloe get together under any circumstances."

His mother at first protested mildly. "Barney, you sound all overwrought."

Barney repeated his message. "I am overwrought, mother. This is a life-and-death matter. Please see that father gets into action at once. Chloe's kidnapped the girl and they are heading toward Philadelphia. Just tell him that. He'll know what to do." He hung up without waiting to hear her say good-bye. He got back into the car and once again its motor began to hum.

He never knew when he reached Philadelphia. He did not realize he was in Philadelphia until he began to recognize landmarks. He rushed headlong toward Rittenhouse Square, past flashing rows of store lights and street lights, past houses and people and automobiles, through the dark, grimly and furiously. When he drew up in front of the Leigh mansion and saw that Chloe's car was parked at the curb, a great gasp escaped him and he began to tremble. He ran up the steps. He rang the door-bell. There was no answer. He beat on the door. Still no answer. He tried to peer through the shutters but they were closed. He shook them and found that they were locked. He ran to a corner and up the street to a drug store. He called the Leigh telephone number and was told that the telephone was out of order. After a few moments he considered getting a policeman at once but instead he went back to his car and drove it to his own house. His mother opened the door. She beheld on the threshold her son. His face was grimy; his eyes were bloodshot; his clothes were disarrayed and grease-spattered! his hair was unkempt and his voice when he spoke was almost inarticulate.

"Where's father?"

"Right here, son." Mr. Avery came from a room adjacent to the hall. He was smoking a cigar and smiling.

"Where's the girl?"

"Easy, easy," his father replied. "You shouldn't get so desperate about it. You look as though you had driven through a war. The girl's all right. Chloe brought her into town quite a long while ago and she hasn't been at home to anybody since."

"Where's Valak?"

"At his hotel, I presume."

"You presume! "

Mr. Avery smiled again. "There is nothing to be excited about. I have had detectives following Valak for a long time. No harm will come to the girl." His smile disappeared and in its

place came a look of faint annoyance. "I cannot imagine, son, why you should get so out of breath over this business. After all, it is only a big legal game that we are playing. We will give the girl adequate protection. Chloe wouldn't do any harm to her in her own house and if she tries to take her out she'll be followed. You seem to have lost your head completely. It's not like you. What's the matter with you?"

Barney was in a state of utter physical exhaustion. A man less sturdy than himself would have collapsed. Barney realized what the matter with him was and he told his father very simply. "Just this. I love that girl, dad. I am crazy about her."

"Eh?" said Mr. Avery and over his face spread an expression of profound astonishment.

With Janet safe in the car, Chloe succumbed to exhaustion. Not even the vexatious problem of what to do with the girl could keep her longer from sleep. But Janet did not mind. Her heart was high and every new turn of the road was delicious excitement. The long limousine sped over flat country and then through hills. Once the chauffeur stopped and asked Janet if she would like a sandwich and some coffee. Later, they were in the mountains. The road ran wild and high. The sun was bright. There were vistas of deep, green valleys and small towns.

In the afternoon Chloe woke again, sighing and complaining.

"It's like a dream," Janet said.

"Humph!"

"See that little house way up there!"

Chloe leaned forward. "How much longer?"

"Three hours--or two and a half, ma'am."

"He's been going terribly fast, Miss Laforge-Leigh. I adore it."

"Humph!"

"And this is the most beautiful car!"

Chloe turned her face away.

Still Janet was undismayed by the woman at her side, who was formidable even in drowsiness. There were in her life too many stimulating personal items that crowded out a close scrutiny of Chloe. Superimposed upon the flashing scenery were continuous and vivid reminiscences of Barney. Through these radiant memories ran the startling truth that a family had been found for her--a name and a heritage. Five thousand dollars was a small fortune. And she was going to a city. She had never been in a city the size of Philadelphia. Columbus was her only metropolitan reality and for the rest she depended upon the dazzling cubism of motion pictures. She was like all her midwestern sisters, a curious combination of a sophistication so rarefied that it scarcely exists and a naïveté of detail that is astonishing in the face of reality.

Janet did not wonder why her *deus ex machina* wheezed and nodded through the long journey. She accepted the fact as intrinsic to the nature of Chloe. She made exciting plans for seeing Barney in Philadelphia and she tried to guess what sort of parents he would have, what sort of home, and what he would do to entertain her. It never occurred to her, for example, that Barney knew ten or a dozen girls who had never seen his parents--knew them well and over a long period of time.

It was late in the afternoon when the car hurried impatiently through the regulated traffic of suburban streets and entered Philadelphia itself. Janet caught glimpses of parks, of tall buildings, of Penn staring over his city from the Municipal Building, of endless narrow streets where the houses rose at right angles to the sidewalks. Rittenhouse Square did not impress her. The flat façade of the Leigh house, the half-story, time-chipped staircase leading to the great

door, the grilled windows, the twisted iron banisters were out of key with her vague notion that Chloe Laforge was rich. She had always visioned broad lawns and stately columns for her hitherto obscure benefactress.

The door opened before the bell was touched and the two women stood in the somber hall. Chloe had carried her plans one step farther, urged by the presence of necessity.

"This young lady will go to the yellow room, Severance," she said. "She will doubtless wish to bathe and rest. Dinner at seven as usual. Will Miss Leigh be here?"

"She has just left. For the evening, madam."

"Very well. Send her maid to Miss Jamison."

The yellow room was a symbol of an ancient decorative rectitude. Figured yellow wallpaper, brass beds, a yellowish carpet and drapes over the windows and doors the color of daffodils. Through the windows Janet could see in the failing light a back yard entirely cemented and a large garage. One of the doors opened into a hall, another into an elaborate bathroom, a third was locked.

The maid knocked. Janet said, "Come in."

"Mademoiselle veut prendre le bain maintenant?"

Janet had studied French but she had never before heard the language spoken by a native. She said, "What?"

The maid, having aired her superiority, translated. Janet had never considered bathing in the afternoon. She had expected to be taken at once by Chloe to an office, or at least to be visited by a lawyer. Otherwise, why had there been so much haste to reach Philadelphia? The question was unanswerable. She nodded.

"What temperature does mademoiselle desire?"

"Medium," Janet said rather breathlessly. It had never occurred to her that people bathed by Fahrenheit instead of the reliable criterion of a hand thrust into the water. The maid frowned. Later she said, "It is ready."

Janet undressed. There was nothing else to do but to submit to the unfamiliar routine. She stepped down into the tub. That, in itself, was voluptuous. There was a mirror hung on the wall so that she could see herself all the time. It embarrassed her, so she splashed water on it and blurred the image.

Fifteen minutes later she was dressed again. Nothing happened for more than an hour. She was very uncomfortable. She thought that they might be waiting for her but she lacked the courage to move. At the end of an interminable time someone else knocked.

"Dinner is served. Will you please come down?"

Her shoes made no sound on the carpeted stairs.

Severance met her in the hall and ushered her to the dining room. Chloe was already sitting at the table. She caricatured a smile and said, "Come in, dear."

Janet warmed to the single word. Severance held her chair. She sat opposite Chloe, a great expanse of table between them. Soup was served.

"It turned out," Janet began, "that there wasn't so much need of getting here this afternoon?"

"Eh?"

"I mean--I thought you had to have me here early."

"Oh." Chloe shook her head so that the brilliants in her comb made the candlelight dance on the high ceiling. "No. Tomorrow will be time enough after all."

"I'm afraid I'm a good deal of a nuisance to you."

"Not at all." The tone did not encourage discussion. They ate through several courses and the sound of her silver each time it touched the china was abnormally loud to Janet's ears. After dinner two doors were rolled away and they walked through them into the drawing room. Chloe was stately and silent. She waved toward a leather chair. "Sit down. There are books. And magazines." Severance was bringing demi-tasses on a tray. "Oh, Severance. Have Emma or Irene bring some of Miss Leigh's magazines."

Chloe picked up a leather-bound volume and began to turn the pages. Janet sat in the chair. The room was tremendous. She would not have believed that so large a room could have existed in the house if she had judged it entirely from the outside. The crystal chandelier in its center was unlighted and small table lamps only partially removed the gloom. There was a gigantic empty fireplace with stained oak seats at each side. Doors to the dining room. A portiere-covered door to the hall. A curious table in the center of one wall. A bronze vase filled with tulips that were almost black. A case of books looking too formal for reading. A rug as thick as bear fur. The entire effect was oppressive.

Janet could not know that twentieth-century dry cleaners had removed from the rug a stain that had been made by the blood of an emperor's mistress. She could not guess that the table was one of the very few Duncan Phyfe's that had a pineapple base. Or that the tulip vase had been presented to Fornot, Duc de la Forge by the mighty Richelieu in 1639 with these grimly jesting words to the ancestor of Chloe and Jonathan Leigh: "Voici quelque chose pour des fleurs. Ne mettez pas des autres choses la dedans. Des épées, par exemple." Or that the ancestor of Chloe and Jonathan Leigh had taken them so lightly as to be dangled from a gibbet a year before the Cardinal's death.

Of all that she was, naturally, ignorant. Nevertheless, the room breathed a poisonous miasma from its mystic and bloody past and even the most obtuse person must be conscious of its haughtiness, of something else less tangible and more unpleasant. Janet was startled when Emma came in with the magazines and dropped them on the table. She took one in her lap, glancing covertly at Chloe who seemed absorbed in her book. But printed lines could not hold the girl's attention.

By and by the telephone tinkled remotely. Severance returned to the room and Chloe looked up.

"His Grace the Duke," Severance said.

It seemed to Janet that Chloe changed color. But her voice was calm. "Tell him I am not in."

"Yes, madam."

"And, Severance--"

"Yes, madam?"

"Is there any way of disconnecting the telephone so that it will not bother us any more this evening?"

"I believe there is. The chauffeur might be able--"

"Tell Raymond to do it at once." Severance bowed and departed. The silence came back to the room and Janet fidgeted. Her first three hours in the house had been queer. But they had not been alarming. Now she was pervaded by a feeling of uneasiness. Cutting off the telephone was an abnormal act. She realized that she had been struggling for the courage to ask permission to call Barney's house. This act destroyed the possibility. She began to think how little she knew of Chloe Laforge-Leigh. Nothing had been natural. There had been no further discussion of her relatives and the estate. She glanced uneasily at Chloe. The chamber seemed to have grown

smaller without bringing them any closer together.

At the other end of the wire Valak hung up the receiver and picked up a telegram. It was in Sabrian and in code. He reread it slowly. His agents, arriving in Mayville, had found that the girl had been taken away that morning by an elderly lady in a large limousine. Neighbors had supplied the information. They, the agents, were waiting for instructions.

Valak knew that it was Chloe. He did not expect that she would answer the telephone when he called. But he did expect that he could tell by the butler's voice when he said she was not in how much truth was in the statement. In that he felt he was successful. Chloe was at home and she either had Janet in the house or had taken her to some place of refuge. He should have guessed that an individual who had once risen to action in the presence of a crisis would again do so. The corpulent, stubborn, hypocritical and inert aspect of Chloe was not the entire composition of her character. He said to himself that she seemed to have a penchant for carrying that particular girl across the face of the world and that thought amused him enormously. In such amusement he entirely, if momentarily, forgot himself and his cause, which was wholly in keeping with his continental attitude.

He called her again in half an hour and found that the telephone was "out of order." From that he guessed Chloe harbored Janet in the house. If the girl had been elsewhere, the servants would have furnished an adequate bulwark against his efforts to call. So drastic a step indicated an unfamiliar situation. He felt that he could almost read Chloe's mind and the perusal disgusted him.

He could scarcely force his way into the house on Rittenhouse Square and assassinate the superfluous heiress. In any case that was not the way he would operate. He realized that Chloe had at least temporarily forestalled him. She would doubtless spend the night in terror of what steps he might take. He contemplated none. Her terror would prevent her from carrying the deeds of the past twenty-four hours any further. It was annoying. Everything was annoying. This development might destroy everything. On the other hand, it might make the entire problem more simple. He called his aide.

"Are there any variety shows in Philadelphia, Leopold?"

"A number of them, sir."

"Any with a troupe of Japanese jugglers?"

"I could consult the newspapers, sir."

"Do so."

Valak lit one of his long cigarettes. The man came back presently. "There are the six Nikos at the Olympus. But whether they are jugglers or tumblers, I cannot discern."

"Either will do. I like both. I will not require you tonight."

"Thank you, sir."

"Coffee at nine tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

The aide brought Valak's hat, stick and gloves.

"Good night, Leopold. Variety shows are a splendid narcotic--with, occasionally, a stimulating effect."

"Yes, sir. Good night, sir."

CHAPTER XII

By nine o'clock the vigil in the great room had become intolerable to Janet. Anything-sitting in her bedroom--would have been preferable. Her patience was at an end. Her alarm had grown slowly until she was filled with unnamed terrors. Her body was clammy with moisture. She was on the point of begging to be allowed to go to her room when a key was inserted in the front door lock. The faint sound frightened her. She saw that Chloe was looking through the portieres with apprehension clearly marked on her features. Her body tensed, as if destruction itself might come into the house.

Instead, the portal swung back and a girl stood on the threshold. She was tall and dark and exquisitely dressed. She said, "Oh, hello, Chloe," and stared at Janet.

Chloe answered with reserve. "I thought you were going to be gone all evening."

"I ducked the binge after dinner. His Majesty tried to tell me how I ought to dance. Not to say with whom." Her eyes had not left Janet, who sank back in her chair with a feebleness born of relief.

Chloe followed the gaze as if it were a line drawn in the air. "Oh. This is Miss Jamison. My niece, Miss Leigh."

"And who is Miss Jamison?" Muriel asked. Without waiting for an answer she said to Janet, "Haven't I seen you before somewhere?"

Chloe spoke uncomfortably. "Miss Jamison has never been in Philadelphia--"

"Palm Beach, then? Cannes? Your face is familiar."

"I don't think so," Janet said.

"Well? " Severance had come and was taking her light wraps.

Chloe cleared her throat. "Miss Jamison will stay with us for--for some little time. She--ah--it is a charity matter."

"Damn funny time to be fooling with charity, Auntie." The statement was so bland that Janet felt it did not even consider her as a human being. Muriel sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Where do you come from?"

"Mayville."

"Never heard of it."

"It's in Ohio."

"Cigarette? "

Janet looked at Chloe. "Why--I don't often smoke--very often. But I think I would like one now."

Muriel nodded. "I understand. Chloe makes you feel that way. Remember the first time you saw me smoke, auntie?"

Chloe said, "I wish you would not refer to me by my first name."

Muriel nodded her head in assent to her statement. "See what I mean?" She flicked ashes into a bowl. "So you're to be a new addition to the family. How about letting me in on the secret, Chloe. I'm sure I've seen her before."

"It's not a secret. Just a matter of a charity I was interested in long ago."

Muriel's long-lidded eyes half closed and she looked at Janet through a trembling pillar of smoke. In another woman the pose would have been affected, carefully considered. In Muriel, it was natural. She saw that the strange girl was wearing a dress she had made herself, a dress copied from the fashion magazines. She could almost guess which one. She made a mental index of Janet. Not metropolitan, not suburban. Not a hick. She wouldn't call the dress "her blue." She smoked rather well. She had brains, a natural composure, a devil of a good chin. Good looks, for

that matter. She wasn't the fussy, braids-and-gingham sort one associated with charity. A sound girl. She probably wouldn't scream if a sailfish hit her lure and she wouldn't necessarily be sentimental in a gondola. Muriel would have guessed that she came from California. She spoke her thoughts. "Mayville, Ohio, must be a pretty lively town."

Janet had survived the inspection intact. She had even returned it. "Not," she said, "as exciting as Philadelphia seems to be."

"Which implies?"

"That I'm a fish out of water, I guess."

"Oh." Muriel's eyebrows went down.

Janet wondered what Chloe would do if she mentioned the disconnected telephone. As if by telepathy Muriel brought up the word.

"It's a wonder Rupert hasn't called me. These Sabrians are usually quick on the trigger at starting a quarrel and just as quick at trying to mend it."

Two alarms moved Chloe simultaneously. One that Muriel would discover the wire was disconnected and the other that her quarrel with the Prince had been serious. The latter prevailed.

"You've antagonized the Prince!"

"Violently. "

Chloe showed the first symptoms of mild apoplexy. "Oh, you are ungrateful, difficult, impossible--"

"Cut," Muriel answered. "Spare me the thesaurus. Don't you know that antagonizing men is the first step in holding them?"

"A prince is different."

"Not so very, aunty. You probably didn't pet much with princes when you were in crinolines."

Janet unexpectedly interrupted this intimate verbal attrition. "You're the girl that is going to marry the Prince!"

Muriel turned to her. "Reading the papers again! "

"You are, aren't you? I didn't remember your name—but--why, I've even seen your picture. And his." She stopped abruptly. The gulf between herself and people who married princes, even between the woman in Philadelphia who sent money every year and Steichen-photographed debutantes was so great that her emotion at the discovery was more shock than a definite awe or astonishment. Two days before if anyone had told Janet that she would be sitting in a room talking casually with the Philadelphia girl whose engagement to Rupert of Sabria was world-spanning news, she would not have troubled to laugh. If anyone had whispered that she owned the house where the girl and her aunt lived--she would have walked away from that person with a significant sympathy.

To the statement that Janet had seen her picture Muriel answered, "Indeed?" There wasn't anything to say, Janet realized. Muriel was not snobbish, or at least not consciously snobbish. She was indifferent. Chloe interrupted her confused hesitation.

"How seriously did you two quarrel?"

"Not very. I told him he was an antiquated and pre-Paleozoic fuss-budget and he told me I was a Mendelian combination of the harpy and the vampire. A few other things. So I walked out."

"I suppose I can be thankful that you still wear his ring."

"Certainly. And I'll doubtless continue to do so as long as he carries my check book."

"Muriel!"

The tall, dark girl chuckled, lifting her shoulders. "Does that hurt your illusions? I'm sorry. But I can't see why he hasn't called."

"The phone is out of order." Chloe frowned heavily at Janet, an expression she interpreted as a command to silence on the manner in which the instrument was quenched.

"You might have hinted that to me at first." Muriel rose. "I think that will do him good. Or do you want me to run down to the corner drug store and ring him up?"

Chloe ignored the sarcasm. Muriel nodded to Janet. "I'm going to go to my beloved books for the rest of the evening. A little Keats to soothe the fevers of the day. Or possibly Ernest Hemingway.

Chloe always reads Hemingway--bound in the covers of *Pilgrim's Progress*. See you in the morning."

Janet smiled and said good night. Chloe started to get to her feet, looked at the girl, and sat down again. She opened the same book and Janet tried to read the faded title. She saw it when Chloe turned a page. It was *Royal and Noble Authors Since Sir Francis Bacon*. There was a long, rumbling thunderclap from outside. A moment later it was repeated, doubled in volume, drowning the sound of the clock as it struck ten. She picked up her magazine once more, but her thoughts were on the girl who was going to marry the Prince.

The house was still. The thunderstorm rolled rapidly into the resonant distance. A thin, scarcely audible patter of rain began. Empty of the presence of Muriel, the room became somber and forbidding once more. Someone rang the doorbell and Chloe put down the book with a sharply drawn breath. One would have thought that she had been waiting for the ring. Severance crossed the hall beyond the portiere.

"Severance! "

He stopped, a look of inquiry on his face.

"Will you look through the window before opening the door and see if the Prince's car is outside."

He scarcely hesitated before performing the commission. He came into the room and moved a blind slightly.

"No, madam. The only car on the street is not his."

"Then pay no attention to the ring."

"I beg your pardon?"

The bell was tinkling continuously. "Do not answer the door. Is it locked?"

"Yes, madam."

"See that all the other doors are locked. Have Raymond make a trip to the cellar. And the windows. I think you had better sit up tonight or have someone sit up to see that no one tries to enter."

"Sit up, madam?"

"Exactly."

The door-bell stopped ringing and a heavy fist beat against the panels. The butler looked dubiously at the source of the noise and then bowed. He left the room without speaking again. Upstairs a door closed softly.

Janet's fears had returned. She looked at Chloe, who was standing pale and determined, her attention on the reverberating portal.

"Is something the matter?"

"Nothing," Chloe said. "Nothing of any importance to you. I think it is time to go to bed."

Janet was in the yellow room and Chloe, waiting in the hall, was glad to hear the key

turned in the lock. She went back to her suite and sat in a gilt chair, breathing sterterously and listening to the noises of night. Presently Muriel knocked. Chloe said that she was too tired to talk, but Muriel came in, heedless of the suggestion.

Muriel said, "Just what the devil is going on here? "

"Nothing."

"I heard you tell Severance not to open the door. What--who was out there?"

"Nobody."

"You don't have to tell me. I suppose you've giving that girl some sort of refuge. It isn't like you."

"I'll tell you about it later."

Muriel shrugged. "You ought not to go in for mystery in your old age. It's bad for the heart." She turned to go. "Funny I keep trying to remember where I've seen her before."

She did not see the expression on her aunt's face. Chloe had suddenly and magically become haggard. Her poise melted. She was feeble and afraid, a trembling old woman. She realized suddenly that Muriel had never before seen Janet, but she had at one time or another seen pictures of Daisy Storey--and Janet was the image of her mother. Chloe had subconsciously taken it for granted. Other people would not. She wished she had the courage not to interfere with Valak. It was beginning to thunder again.

CHAPTER XIII

Man must certainly have lived a pleasant life when he believed in the gods. There is no solace in any contemporary philosophy; rather, in the glare of its illumination, one is either very strong or very foolish. Chloe Laforge-Leigh could not wake into the haunted day and shrug responsibility from her heavy shoulders by saying that the Three Sisters had spun an evil thread into her fate. Janet could not admit that a demon of mischance possessed her. Barney could not calm his harassed soul by some orthodox propitiation of his gods. On the contrary, each of them, in kind with each other human being who wakes in any twentieth-century morning) was vividly aware that yesterday's fires must be rekindled for today with human hands and must be kept from burning too high or going out entirely without even the hope of divine interference. But perhaps even those who believed in the gods had so little faith as to be constantly interposing highly purposeful activities of their own invention.

Still, coincidence, chance, cross-intents are all related to providence at least in that they form a pattern. A somewhat perverted woman had put a false heiress in her brother's house. The brother had died. A prince had wooed the heiress. A young man had found the real daughter and loved her. The mentor of the Prince had learned the truth about the false heiress and planned to remove the daughter. Then the somewhat perverted woman, preoccupied by fear, had brought the banished daughter to her house. All simple actions, once the premise is set in motion. Yet, what ramifications, what tangled motives, what immense emotions burst instantaneously from this relatively trivial disorder.

In the morning Valak acted first. At the top of a square sheet of notepaper he wrote, "Chloe Laforge-Leigh" and the numeral, "1." Underneath were symbols which represented his thoughts:

Chloe had Janet, the real heiress, in her possession.

If anyone--Avery, for example--tried to prove that Chloe had changed Jonathan Leigh's baby for an impostor, Chloe would have a good defense. Anyone trying to prove it would naturally furnish a daughter alleged to be the real one. Anyone furnishing such a daughter could easily be accused of scheming to divert the Leigh fortune from Muriel. Therefore Avery would be forced to go slowly, if that was his intent. Valak thought it was. Avery's position was much more difficult because Janet was living at the Leigh house. That would be hard to explain in court.

Chloe, if Chloe could be believed, was the only person who knew positively, who could know positively, that Janet and not Muriel was Leigh's daughter.

Valak rose from his writing table, crossed the room to the telephone and ordered another pot of coffee. He glanced through the jottings he had made. Obviously, Chloe's position was not altogether without foundation.

He wrote the name of Avery.

Avery's position was still equivocal. Avery knew that there was something wrong in the Leigh household. How much did Avery know? The Duke shrugged. Not enough to cause him to do anything active. Avery was waiting. For what?

Valak wrote his own name. He finished it with a flourish. He knew all about everything. Muriel was the orphan of an obscure French family. Janet, whatever she might prove to be as a person, was a country Cinderella. Everyone was protecting Janet--for an ideal. "If she had a real champion," Valak thought, smilingly, "there would be very little use for me to continue any effort to move the Leigh fortune from America to Sabria. I know everything. I can do nothing. None of us can do anything. We sit like fools with baited hooks over a pond where there is one fish and nobody will let any other person drop his line into the water. We are"--he fumbled for the American word--"deadlocked."

His gaze traveled moodily to the window. As if he were walking after a thing he had tossed away, he followed it to the sill and stared into the street. The clanging trolley cars, the hurrying people, the intermittently moving automobiles vanished. He could see Sabria again, smell it and feel it. A little country. A magnificent little country. He could see the cold of winter come down on Sabria, the bread lines, the busy offices of the Red Cross in the center of the capital. He could see the tentacles of poverty clutching at the royal family. He could hear the bawling of the communist agitators in the street, promising everything in reward for destruction. Then himself in Philadelphia--struggling, plotting, scheming with a flatulent old woman. Balked by a peasant girl from Mayville, Ohio. All that for the gold that had belonged to a dignified and reactionary old man. All fear and worry and disappointment, all the encouragement of Rupert's love-making, all the parties and hotel suites, invitations, smiles, bows, compliments--for Sabria. A little country. Philadelphia. Chloe. Sabria. Valak realized suddenly how weird his world had become, how strangely man is made into the puppet of his imagination, how odd it is when he discovers himself engaged in performing a dream.

He went back to the writing table, glanced at the list he had made to print it in his mind, and tore the paper into small pieces. Then he rang for Leopold.

"Is Prince Rupert awake?"

"I believe His Highness is having breakfast."

"Good. Ask him to step in when he has finished."

The square fragments fell into the waste basket. Valak did not move again until the Prince entered.

"Ah, Valak, your man brought me a summons. What ho?"

"Sit down, Rupert."

"Fine. That means you want to talk to me. If I were to talk to you, now, I'd have to stand. Only a few men could talk sitting down--John Falstaff, because he couldn't get to his feet--Pope, because he was crippled--"

Valak smiled. The expression indicated that he understood what Rupert was saying, but that his preoccupation, once announced, would end all chatter, however droll.

"What is the subject of the discourse?" Rupert asked.

"Muriel."

The Prince raised his eyebrows. He became instantly receptive. Watching him, the Duke could not quite fathom what his emotions of the next few moments would be. He knew, however, that Rupert would maintain an exquisite control over him.

"I have something to tell you about Muriel," Valak commenced, "that will shock you profoundly." He could see the young man wondering what it would be even as he covered that wonderment by a casual nod. He continued in Sabrian. "Muriel Leigh is not the daughter of Jonathan Leigh."

Rupert did not budge. His expression changed, seemingly without assistance of his facial muscles. "Tell me about it."

Valak told him. He told the story without indirection and without any effort at giving the actors either character or motive. He finished the narrative by telling of his unsuccessful attempt to interfere with the girl in Ohio and his determination to continue his effort to capture the Leigh fortune. In the middle of the recital Rupert shut his eyes.

When it was ended he said, "That is very sad, isn't it?"

"Sad?" Valak repeated.

"Sad."

"Ah. You mean--for you--for me--for Sabria, if things go wrong now--as it seems they well may?"

"Not at all. I mean for Muriel."

"Muriel?"

Slowly Rupert took his cigarette case from his pocket and lighted a cigarette. He spent a long time tapping the tobacco on the embossed silver crest. "That is tragedy, Valak. Suppose someone suddenly discovered that you were not a duke but the son of a goatherd?"

"In dwelling on the mischance of an individual, aren't you overlooking--your country?"

"Your favorite theme, Valak."

"Well? What you oppose is sentimentality. Absolutism. A foolish and unsocial American ideal--"

"I don't oppose it. I merely note it." Valak took his station at the window, this time with his back to the street and his eyes on the Prince. Sadness was scarcely the emotion he had anticipated. Still, he perceived, it was less unlike Rupert than it was unlike the traditions of Rupert's ancestors. In any case, he was too skillful to be harsh or unsympathetic.

"I think," he said at last, "that some sort of deal can be made."

Rupert nodded. "That is up to you, of course. Meanwhile, I reserve the right to think exclusively about Muriel."

"If you wish."

"I'm glad you told me, Valak."

"It was something you had to know--sooner or later."

Rupert rose with a certain rigidity. "You will excuse me now?"

"Certainly."

Valak felt, as the Prince crossed the room, that he was commanding his right foot and then his left foot to move forward.

"He said he must see you at once."

Chloe held Barney Avery's card in her fingers and stared at it. "At once? Why didn't his father come instead?"

"I don't know, Miss Laforge-Leigh," Severance answered.

Barney was standing in the drawing room. His arms were behind his back as if locked there to prevent their activity. His jaw was thrust out. His eyes were bloodshot.

"I am here to see Miss Jamison."

Chloe received the statement calmly and returned it with a long, hostile regard. It meant that the Averys, father and son, knew that there was a Miss Jamison; it meant that they knew in all probability who she was; it meant that they knew she was in the house. She answered with a bland lie.

"And who is Miss Jamison?"

Barney took a half-step toward her. "You know who she is. She is Jonathan Leigh's daughter. She is the girl you cheated out of her life and name and fortune. She is the girl you brought here because you were afraid someone would find her. Is that enough?"

Chloe did not flinch. "You are quite mad. Quite, my dear young man."

"You will bring her to me--or shall I go for her?"

"There is no such person in my house."

Barney shrugged. "It happens that there is. My father's detectives saw you bring her here. They know she has not left. Will you be good enough to call her?"

Chloe pretended to study him. "There is a girl here--a girl whom I was giving temporary shelter. A charity matter. She is the only person in the house besides Muriel, myself, the servants. If you refer to her--"

"That's the story, eh? Well, I do."

"It would be impossible for you to see her."

"I'll--"

"Young man, your behavior is disgraceful. I shall ask my servants to show you out. To restrain you, if necessary." Chloe turned her back on him.

Barney understood only that he was going to fail to see Janet. He caught Chloe's sleeve. His voice was husky. "Wait, Miss LaForge-Leigh. Don't you understand? I've got to see her. I love her."

Her face went blank with astonishment. "You what?"

"I love her."

"When did that happen?"

"In Mayville. I went to Mayville. I met her there. I fell in love with her. I--"

For an instant Chloe thought that Barney might have met Janet and fallen in love with her by some wild freak of coincidence. She realized quickly that he had gone to Mayville for the purpose of finding the girl and that his love for her was the accident. Chloe now understood completely the devastating extent of Avery's information. He knew about the two babies. He had located Janet. And his son had fallen in love with the girl. Accustomed to investigate every facet of life in the light of her own requirements, pressed by the urgency of the situation, Chloe instantly wondered if Barney's interest in Janet could not be turned to profit. At once she

perceived a nucleus for the hypothesis that Valak was turning over in his mind even at that moment: any effort of the Averys to prove that Janet was Leigh's heiress would have the appearance of an attempt by the Averys to steal the Leigh fortune. That Barney was in love with Janet would give the situation a very obvious seeming.

Why not let Barney see the girl, then? She clearly saw the state of his mind and realized that the threat of violence at the hands of her servants would stave him off only temporarily. If she could bargain with him for time--time in which to think--she might be able to construe the Avery case into an impasse or even a dangerous boomerang.

Barney had let go his hold of her sleeve. She had stood with a slack face and darting eyes while she considered. Now she underwent a mechanical revision that gave her the outward semblance of generosity.

"My dear boy, why didn't you say you cared about the child in the first place?"

Barney regarded her with suspicious surprise. "Why--"

"That quite alters the situation. Quite. Of course, the idea you and your father have concerning Miss Jamison's antecedents is a monstrous and unjust error." Her lip trembled. "It hurts me. I have always been so fond of you both." She sighed. "That is the way of the world--suspicion and injustice. Of course, you may see her. But wait. I want you to promise me something first."

"I won't promise a thing."

"Very well--" She reached for the bell pull.

"What is it?"

"I want you to promise to say nothing to her about this ridiculous notion of your father's. It would be unkind to her. It would be unkind to Muriel, to me, to the memory of my brother."

Barney frowned. The thing Chloe had asked him not to tell was the very thing he had dreaded most to impart to Janet. As long as she did not know about her fortune, she would not think of him as a mercenary lover. He hesitated in his reply to Chloe not because he comprehended her intricate motives (he was too impatient for that) but because he had whipped himself to the point of telling Janet. He had made the decision, found the courage and he had come. Suddenly Chloe swept away the need. Pure emotional inertia made him falter.

"That is a fair exchange for seeing her," Chloe said.

"Well--" Time, Barney's mind whispered. Time in which to prepare her for the fact.

"How do you know I can be trusted?"

Chloe pursed her lips. "I know you can be."

"Very well. I agree."

"Your word of honor, Mr. Avery."

"My word. Where is she?"

"Still in bed, I think. I'll have someone sent for her. Remember, Mr. Avery, I am being very generous to you."

Barney began to walk back and forth on the thick carpet.

CHAPTER XIV

She stood in the doorway. She was smiling. She was calm. The vehement drama his imagination had made for that meeting suddenly evaporated. Barney, too, felt calm--and very

tired.

"Hello, Barney."

"Hello, Janet."

"I thought you'd find me. I knew you'd come here when father told you where I had gone."

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

She walked up to him and held his two hands. Her kiss was very light. "I'd be afraid to kiss you much in this house. Too many servants--and a few ghosts, I think."

They looked at each other. "When did you get here?"

"Last night. I called here at the house--but they wouldn't let me in. I telephoned, but the wire was out of order." The strong inhibition that had been so abruptly put upon him had paralyzed all his faculties for conversation. "How do you like Philadelphia? "

"Fine--since you've come."

"That's nice." Why can't I tell her? Barney thought. Why can't I get it over with? Why, why do we have to be here like this when there is so much happiness or so much disappointment to be uncovered?

"You look terribly tired."

"I haven't had much sleep."

"Are you worried about anything?"

"Not a thing."

"You haven't congratulated me about the family Miss Laforge-Leigh has found for me. Isn't it wonderful! And I realized only this morning that I hadn't even asked what my real name is! Imagine!"

"I'm very glad."

Janet sobered. "Barney, what's eating you?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is. Have you told your family about me and they don't they like it?" "My family will adore you."

"Then what on earth is wrong? You look as if you'd lost your last friend. And all you do is say 'yes,' 'no,' 'nothing'--" Barney stared at her miserably.

"Have you had breakfast? "

"No, I haven't. But that doesn't make any difference--"

"Would you care to come out with me?"

"I can't. Miss Laforge-Leigh sent the maid to wake me--I was already up--and asked me to stay in this morning."

Barney nodded. Irene was standing at the door. "Miss Laforge-Leigh asked me to say that breakfast is served."

"You see? I've got to go."

"Couldn't I wait?"

She shook her head. "I don't think you'd better, dear. This is such a peculiar house--and Miss Laforge-Leigh is so odd--"

"Yes," Barney said. "She is--odd."

"You positively give me the creeps!"

"It's nothing."

"So you said. Can't you please tell me?"

"No."

"Well--I've got to go for breakfast."

"Well--I'll call you up later."

"All right."

Their eyes met uncomprehendingly. Barney could bear it no longer. He took her in his arms, lifted her off her feet, buried his face in the bright aura of her hair. She held up her lips.

"Promise me that you love me--no matter what?"

"Of course I do, Barney."

"Regardless of how I may seem to you?"

She drew her face from his and smiled. "Honestly--you're like a kid that has done something naughty. Have you? I know you haven't because if you were worrying about anything like that, you'd tell me." She laughed unevenly. "I always have thought of you as so superior and so calm. Now--you're just all in pieces. I felt as if something dreadful were going to happen--till you kissed me."

"It won't," Barney said, "if you only continue to believe that I care more about you than anything else on earth."

"Don't doubt me. It's unflattering. I've got to go now. The maid will see us."

"I don't care."

"Masculine immodesty. Call me up later. I feel much better already. Only you better plan to tell me your evil secret pretty soon. I'll bet it turns out to be silly. Loose me, please."

He let her go. She opened the front door for him.

"Bye."

"Bye."

Barney became one of the million-odd young men who are remorseful over the way they have behaved in the presence of the lady of their heart's desire. He walked rigidly across Rittenhouse Square and turned in the direction of his father's office. Just seeing Janet, merely assuring himself that she was safe had been the bright fetish of the last twenty-four hours. Having her in his arms had been simple and natural but hopelessly inconclusive. The appearance of intimacy sometimes hides great gulfs of fact and feeling.

If Barney had had more experience of the world he would have acted differently--particularly in the matter of accusing Chloe with the substitution of babies. That accusation revealed to Chloe exactly what the Averys knew.

As he walked across Rittenhouse Square toward his father's office Barney was clearly conscious of his error. There was nothing to do about it now. He could not determine what the precise effect of the disclosure would be and realized only that he must confess it to his father at once.

It was his personal interest in Janet which had frustrated him, blocked the normal functioning of his intelligence, and put innumerable restraints upon him. Barney was in every way normal. But he had been under such a continuous strain since his departure for Mayville that it would have been abnormal to act rationally at this time. He moved in a nightmare of uncertainties. There was no opportunity for a pleasant certainty to assert itself.

Even his father had been of no direct assistance. He had expressed surprise on the previous night when Barney had reached his home. That was all. His father had listened to his story on the previous night with such concentrated silence that Barney could not guess his thought. Perhaps his father was angry because he had fallen in love with a country girl. Perhaps he was merely absorbed in the legal aspects of the case. He had told Barney that his detectives had reported the arrival of Janet at the Leigh mansion. He had insisted that Barney go to bed and

sleep. Barney had not seen him in the morning.

He opened the door of his father's office with a sweep of his arm and again he was checked by the foreign aspect of another person. Douglas Avery was quietly dictating letters. He looked up and said, "Come in, son. I'll be through in a moment."

Barney hung his straw hat on the rack and waited. His father finally dismissed the stenographer.

"I should presume, Barney, that you've seen her."

"I have." He gave a rapid account of the past hour. He terminated it with a statement typical of his cumulative mood. "In other words, I've been a complete fool."

"I wouldn't say so. It's too bad, of course, that you let go like that to Chloe. The promise she got from you was pretty shrewd."

"What do you mean?"

"It cements her defense against us."

"Which is?"

"That we fabricated the proof about Miss Jamison. That we are seeking the money for ourselves. That, once we have it conferred on Miss Jamison, you will marry her and the deed will be done."

"Good God!"

"On the other hand, you drove what was a good bargain."

"I ruined Janet's chances."

"You hurt them. But you saw her--which was what you wanted."

Barney nodded. He felt as if he had betrayed his father for the sake of his own satisfaction. Douglas Avery smiled.

"You're the first hot-headed Avery in six generations."

"The first moron in the family."

"Stick to your guns." He sighed. "Love never came to me like that. And it's my loss. If you weren't in love--I'd say your forcible and piratical entrance was very, very stupid. Love gives it a certain nobility."

"I know it. I'm disgusted with myself." Barney ignored the excuse his father proffered. "Good." Suddenly Avery chuckled. "I'm damned if I can think of you as modern."

Barney did not answer.

"It's pure King Arthur--your flivver ride from Mayville--the hot confession you made last night--oh--don't get sore. The devil take you. I'm practically proud of you. You've risen above this"--he waved his hand at the office--"the dull and droning preparation of briefs that has occupied the Averys since Benjamin Franklin hired us, since the Revolution, since the beginning of law, probably. Damn it--" Douglas Avery's slang was exhausted. His ability to express that particular motif, too, could carry him no further. He saw that his words hurt his son. "I'm sorry, Barney. I hope she's worth it. I know she is," he amended. "I hope you are going to be able to be one of the few men who cannot remember the value you once put upon a woman and her love but who can always keep that value at the same degree. Is that pompous?"

"It doesn't clear anything away."

"No." Avery turned his paper knife in his fingers. "What will? You want a surcease for the tribulations that exist merely because of circumstance. You want the Gordian knot cut. What would you think if I said that it could never be cut?"

"What!"

"Exactly. I examined everything last night in the light of what you told me. Men are

prone to imagine that there is a solution to everything. A solution to life. A solution to death. A solution for every possible complication of human affairs. I mean a complete and final solution. There isn't any."

"I don't understand you."

"You refer everything to this present situation. Well, that is the thing to do. Look at it. Chloe did one ill-advised thing. The stone was flung into the water. And now the ripples are spreading. Valak wants a fortune for his country. Who are we to say that such a desire isn't a worthy, even a tremendously worthy one? Perhaps he can save several million people from starvation or communism or annexation. Perhaps he can improve their lot permanently.

"Rupert of Sabria wants the same thing. Can you say that he is not in love with Muriel? I believe he is. Then his rights are as important to him as yours to you--and you've exercised a good deal of liberty on those assumed rights.

"It is Muriel's fault that she is not Leigh's daughter? Is it safe to be the agent of fate under the guise of justice?

"Chloe from her own point of view is justified also. We know that she was warped, biased, prejudiced, mistaken. *She* never will.

"Look at Miss Jamison. Our legal system says that the estate belong to her. Does she need it--especially if you marry her?"

"That's what I thought. Why don't I just--elope with her?

"Because you haven't the right to make the decision either way. Even Jonathan Leigh did not have that right and perhaps that is why he left clues in our hands. Perhaps he thought the equities involved might be plainer at some future time. If I could know now what he would do now--that would settle everything.

"Consider ourselves again. Chloe and Valak, Muriel and a good attorney might bring to nothing our best effort to prove Miss Jamison's claim. That might permanently harm us--as well as her. My thoughts sound reactionary. I am reactionary. We might possibly be better off if we had not tampered."

"I would not have met Janet."

"Consider that, then, our asset."

"You're pretty generous about a strange girl."

Avery gestured to remove the traces of sentiment. "I have faith in you. So has your mother. You ought to talk to your mother more. She never failed me. Wisdom in women. Somebody wrote a poem about it. They can't think as well as men. But often their guesses are better than any man's. The digression is important and applicable. I've thought continuously about all this."

"So have I."

"And your conclusions?"

Barney shrugged. "Weren't even as well based as your summary of it all."

"Naturally not. You were biased. A bias helps you through life. Almost everyone lives by a bias. Impartiality is too insulting to vanity." He considered his son gravely. "Each of us has a little piece of the whole fabric. Each has an advantage and a disadvantage--some of them real and some of them only seeming to be real. We can all check each other."

Barney laughed without mirth. "Love, money, power, fame--oh, hell and the devil."

"That's not the attitude either. Certainly those are the things involved. Otherwise we would not be so perturbed by it." He stood up and reached for his hat. "Classification only shows that we can do nothing. Want to have lunch with me?"

"You aren't just leaving things fiat like that?"

"What else?"

"I suppose you consider me a walking false alarm?"

"Walking alarm--not false." Douglas Avery took his son's arm. "If you could tell me what to do, I'd do it. In my whole life as a lawyer I was never involved in anything so preposterous and so profound. There is nothing to do. Won't you join me for lunch?"

"I can't."

"Waiting for a telephone call?"

"Of course."

Avery opened the door and then turned. "If she calls and if you go to see her again, you better buy a new necktie, wash behind your ears and take her some flowers. It isn't doomsday, you know."

Barney nodded. The door closed. He doubled his fist and wrinkled his brow. He told himself that he would do some thinking. Yet his thoughts were a circuit: Janet . . . what a mess life could become . . . a man of his age should have better self-control . . . Janet again.

CHAPTER XV

"You look ill, Severance."

"I was not permitted to sleep last night, your Grace."

Valak raised his eyebrows. "Indeed? Indigestion?"

"I was kept awake to perform a duty, sir. Guarding the house."

"Guarding the house?"

"Exactly, sir."

A transient smile moved the Duke's features. "Against what?"

"I do not know, sir. Against some sort of burglary, I presume. Miss Laforge-Leigh's conception."

"Ah! Will you take my card to her?"

Severance returned with the card. His expression was perplexed. "She is out, your Grace?"

"She said so, eh?"

"Precisely, sir. Ah--no, sir. She is not in."

Valak scribbled on the back of a card. Severance went into the dining room. When he came back, he ushered the Duke into the living room. Chloe came in a moment later.

"I am really hurt, my dear Miss Laforge-Leigh," he began, "to realize that you feared my--ah--my first effort in this matter which interests us so greatly would extend into your domicile."

"Do you deny that you tried to get in last night--or one of your representatives?"

"Most emphatically."

"Who did, then?"

Valak lifted his hands delicately. "A caller? A telegraph boy? I cannot guess. Severance tells me that he was the faithful watchdog. But, really, when I found from my agents that you had escorted--ah--a certain person here--I thought it was very ingenious. I should, perhaps, have been forewarned by your previous facility in--let us say--the transportation of human beings."

Chloe concerned herself first with the remarks that had slighted her.

"Did you come here to insult me, your Grace? have suffered enough--"

"On the contrary."

He stared pleasantly into her agate eyes. She said, "Humph! Then who tried to get in? Avery! Young Avery. That's who it was. He came here this morning."

"I take it your guard was ready for him?"

"Severance let him in. Severance knows him. He wanted to see Miss Jamison. I permitted it, with the one requirement that he say nothing to her about--about--"

"Just a moment. I am interested in knowing how our young friend became acquainted with Miss Jamison."

He listened patiently to Chloe's exposition and to her explanation of her reasons for letting Barney talk to Janet.

"You have a prodigious sagacity, Miss Laforge-Leigh," he said finally. "Prodigious. Sabria can use such a network of thinking power."

"You really think so, your Grace!"

"Absolutely. Utterly. It was Machiavellian. Now--" Valak drew a long breath. He was aware of Avery's knowledge and he was considering rapidly the unfortunate light in which Barney's passion put the lawyer. It was vastly more than he had hoped to glean from a call upon Chloe. It was worth, even, the tedious pain of listening to the woman's monarchical aspirations.

He was compelled to listen for some time. Chloe explained in great detail her efforts to save the glory of the name of Leigh and more particularly of Laforge. She outlined a few of the capacities which would recommend her for a position close to the throne of Sabria. Janet's entrance interrupted her.

Ordinarily Janet would not have done such a thing. She had been eating her breakfast, thinking about Barney, when Severance had brought in a card. Chloe took it, and said she was out. Severance returned and showed a message on the card to his mistress. Then Chloe excused herself. Janet continued to make the remotely conscious gestures of eating. The card was lying at Chloe's place, message side up. Janet read it before she realized that she had no right to do so. It said, "I have given up the plan for the Mayville girl. You have no reason to fear me. V."

When she realized that it referred to herself she was not surprised. When she perceived that Chloe's terror of the previous night had been on her account, she was curious and possibly a little frightened. She could hear the mumble of voices through the double doors. Nothing tangible had been said about the promised legacy. Valak, Duke of Lower Sabria, had no meaning to her. She had not been invited to join Chloe and her guest, and she had not been forbidden to do so. She was not anxious to spend another night in the Leigh house. Her nature in the face of crises or complexities involving herself was one that turned naturally to the simplest and most direct procedure. This man knew about her. Perhaps he would speak when Chloe was cryptic. It was something definite and a thing on which to gamble. She rose, and went into the living room.

She saw a rather elderly and exceedingly distinguished-looking man. He was tall, thin, decidedly un-American. She had seen his type, usually caricatures, invariably exaggerated, in the motion pictures. She saw Chloe's startled expression when she parted the portieres. It was Chloe's motion to her to withdraw that attracted Valak's attention. He lifted his monocle to his eye and looked at her.

He said, "Ah!" quite softly and faced his hostess. "This is the young lady."

Chloe was very angry. "This is a private discussion, Miss Jamison, and I need not say that you are most unwelcome."

Janet would have left immediately, but Valak smiled. "On the contrary. I am eager to meet Miss Jamison."

Chloe hesitated. "Very well. Come in. His Grace, the Duke of Lower Sabria, may I present Miss Jamison."

Valak took Janet's hand and kissed it. Then he stood away from her in a long, unapologetic appraisal. "Very pretty. Quite ravishing. You failed to tell me. Resembles—ah—ah--resembles one of your actresses whom I cannot call to mind. Dear me. I'm becoming absent-minded. One is naturally shocked--ah--won't you sit down?"

Janet moved into the chair. She felt surer of herself than she had at any time since her arrival in Philadelphia.

"Your first trip to Philadelphia?" Valak asked.

"Yes."

"One addresses Motvia as 'your Grace,' Miss Jamison." It was merely the froth of Chloe's indignation.

"Pshaw," Valak said. "I prefer not to use titles in America. You like it here?"

"Really," Janet said, "I've been here for so short a time that I can't say. It was kind of Miss Laforge-Leigh to bring me."

Valak beamed at Chloe. "Ah! Of course. Let's see--your relation to Miss Laforge-Leigh would be--"

"Your Grace!" Chloe said hoarsely.

"Oh, I'm not related to her."

Valak looked surprised. "No?"

"Miss Laforge-Leigh was interested in me merely through charity. She arranged to have me adopted, twenty years ago and recently she has found my family. They are all dead, but I believe they have left a few heirlooms for me. It was rather nice of her to remember me through all these years, don't you think so?"

Chloe was apoplectic. She struggled to think of a way to stop the girl's prattle. The careful thrusts Valak had made between Janet's statements were even more unbearable. Chloe did not realize at all and Valak only half guessed that Janet's blithe account was in reality a searching interrogation point; Janet was asking them both to tell her the whole truth about herself and put an end to her confusion.

Valak said, "Miss Laforge-Leigh has managed the affairs of a number of people with great effectiveness."

Janet realized that the statement had a double meaning. It brought Chloe to her feet. "This is ridiculous."

"Oh, quite," Valak said.

There was nothing, then, to be learned. Janet looked from the woman to the man. She stood. "I'm dreadfully sorry that I intruded. I was on my way to my room."

Valak took her hand. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Jamison. I hope to be able to repeat it very soon."

"Thank you."

There was a little interval during which Valak regarded Chloe with speculative interest and decided, perhaps, that she would not fall dead of her excitement.

"And now, my dear lady, I shall leave you."

She did not answer.

"I hope my call has not disturbed you?"

"I feel," Chloe said in a strange voice, "that you nearly betrayed me."

"I skirted betrayal merely to punish you, Miss Laforge-Leigh."

"You are cruel."

"Ah? I am sorry then. One's soul makes such things sometimes essential. Do not worry. I bid you adieu, then."

Chloe sat down and filled the still room with the aura of her dark thoughts.

It is doubtful if there are any men who may be compared with women such as Chloe Laforge-Leigh. A man's rascality may be fierce and terrible. A man may be a miser or a hypocrite. Yet there are few perverse men who do not at some time or other catch one lucid glimpse of that perversity and realize that they are going against the order of their fellows. No man can so bloat himself with self-righteousness, so invert his judgment, so torture his mind as never to doubt in his infallibility. Man's armor is not sufficiently tough.

Yet Chloe had so powerfully compounded duty out of her immense vanity that she saw any effort to turn her aside as unwonted and unholy persecution. Knowing that the law would hold her wrong never caused her to doubt the justice of her acts. She saw truth as a malicious attitude.

The vengeance of twenty pregnant years hung over her. Not for one instant did she consider herself to blame. There are many women like Chloe. They may be eliminated some day from a healthier civilization. They are not to be pitied. They are the blemishes germinated by the short sight of our own codes and morals, our own taboos and conventions, our own teachings and beliefs. Sometimes such women go to their justified doom. In Salem they were burned occasionally. More often, pluming their ostentatious feathers, they remain like ugly birds on the places where the good young have already died. Aunts, grandmothers, elderly sisters, with horrid yellow hair and gargoyle faces, smelling of senility, constant in the groove of their self-aggrandizing "duty," all smugly critical of ruined homes, of wrecked lives, of dipsomaniacs, of suicides which they have subtly contrived-these old women are the most awesome manifestation of the evil intrinsic in man's vast imperfection.

Chloe was all that. She was fifty-three years old and looked sixty. She was obese and her habits were not quite cleanly. Her mind was warped and greedy. She was more. Birth had given her a social station from which it was unlikely she should ever fall. From the day of her birth there had been ground into her the importance of the proper appearance of a thing, regardless of its true character. Instead of washing her face, she rouged and powdered it. That was an expression of her philosophy. The worst indictment she might expect from her equals and contemporaries could be shrugged off as gossip or as jealousy. But, like herself, her contemporaries were not so much interested in the truth about themselves as in the seeming of themselves. Truth might be a mirror. Truth is never good for such people and they do not wish to look upon it. And a man without eyes is less blind than one who does not wish to see.

Chloe sat in the room, a figure to discourage the day, frantically thickening the veil she had stretched across her soul.

It was Rupert's own roadster, the one he had bought since his engagement to Muriel. She sat beside him. Their talk had all been in staccato, its middle and important parts often broken by the urgencies of speed and uncertain traffic. The same quick refocusing had kept their eyes on the road rather than each other. They did not wish to look at each other, for that matter, and their natures made the speed necessary. Without the additional absorption of an obligato, their thoughts might have been unbearable.

"You can see, of course," Rupert said quickly, "that I have neither the right nor the reasons to justify telling you."

"Nevertheless you did." Muriel's hand clenched the door as a turn was made around a hayrack. "Which obviously means--"

"That you're in love with me."

There was a big car, flashing in the sunlight. A signboard. A long stone fence.

"And I would never have found it out, perhaps, if it hadn't happened."

Muriel smiled at him. "Who would? The happy are the cynical. Maybe it's vice versa. Can we go faster?"

"If we don't pick up a cop."

"I always knew that Chloe was an unspeakable--"

"Don't bother to say it."

"Well?"

He risked a glance at her. "Valak seems to think he can get away with it in spite of everything."

"How does he feel about marrying French peasantry into Sabria?"

"He has a more important interest."

"Money. I shan't forget money from now on."

"No, no--I've never been allowed to."

Muriel grinned at him. "You're really something, Rupert. You have guts. I feel as if I'd like to park and neck with you. The peasant streak turning up at last, I suppose."

The Prince let go of the wheel with one hand. He took off her hat and thrust his fingers in her hair. For an instant they remained there, disheveling her coiffure.

"That do?"

"Thanks," she said.

They drove for five miles without speaking. "I suppose the Averys will want to get it into the papers right away. That's the procedure, isn't it?"

"I don't know."

"It'll be tough on you," she said.

"Don't make a martyr of me. As far as I'm concerned--"

"A nice piece of irony, what?" She laughed. "You try to marry a girl for her money. Through the goodness of God you and she get 'that way' about each other. And lo! the applecart is upset by the hand of fate. Wonderful. Magnificent. When you marry some other rich girl, Rupert, can I be your mistress? "

Rupert looked back. "I nearly hit that Elk or Mason or whatever he was."

"It's things like that that make girls like me go feminine and weep real tears," she said.

"Sorry. I'll hit the next one."

"Ten miles." Abruptly he stopped the car and kissed her. "Want to get married in the next town?"

"You'd do it, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"No, then. Let's go back."

It was just noon. Muriel opened the front door and saw Chloe sitting in the living room. Whatever was in Chloe's mind had been of such weight as to hold her there, as if a stone she could not move had been put in her lap. Muriel went into the room. She was somewhat more pale

than usual.

"Hello, Chloe," she said softly.

Her aunt looked up.

"May I sit down?"

"I have no objection."

Muriel crossed her legs and lit a cigarette. "Rupert," she began casually, "just told me I was of pure French descent." Chloe translated the remark into its meaning. "Rupert! He knows?"

"Valak told him."

Veins swelled on the face of the older woman. "The fool! " Muriel shrugged. "If that makes him a fool--just what do you think it makes you, Chloe?"

"How do you dare make such--"

"Don't be cross. You're innocent. You did the right thing. The fact that you stole Miss Jamison's life and gave it to me and that I'm going to lose mine now is a minor consideration." Even Chloe could catch the sharp scream of sarcasm; it was like the sound of a sword swiftly whipped through the air.

"You ruined the first part of her life and the rest of mine. But you kept your proud name safe for twenty years. Except for you, dear auntie, I would probably be walking the streets of Paris. I just thought I would come in and thank you."

"You've been drinking! "

"I haven't. But it's a good idea."

Chloe looked at her. "Is that all you have to say?"

"No. One other thing. When the papers gently lay the unmoving and pure white body of Muriel Leigh on the garbage pile, I am going to see to it that little Muriel is accompanied to the incinerator by the putrid carcass of Chloe Laforge-Leigh." She stood. Her eyes crackled. "Damn you." Her voice became bantering again. "See you in hell, dear auntie." She left.

Afternoon. Barney rang the door-bell.

"Miss Jamison is in the music room."

"Roses," Barney said.

Janet opened the box. "They're gorgeous. I always liked the yellow ones best. I'll put them in my room--it's yellow, too."

"I'm glad you called me," he said.

"I was lonesome. I always am when you're not with me. And Miss Laforge-Leigh asked me to stay till tomorrow, she promised to fix everything then."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing." She told him about Valak's card and her intrusion. "Do you think it's all right to stay here?"

"I guess so. This man--Valak--wanted to know all about you?"

"He was a little bit curious. I think he knew something about me before he met me. I know he did. The card shows that, doesn't it? You know, I have a feeling that you knew something about me, too. That's why you came to Mayville, isn't it?"

The dread of the construction she would put on his trip to Mayville burned in him. "Perhaps."

"But you won't tell. Nobody will tell. I had a feeling last night before I went to sleep that if I really had brains--what do the detective stories call it?--the power of inductive reasoning--I could figure everything out for myself. I felt it even more this morning. You won't help me. Miss

Laforge-Leigh won't. And even this Mr. Valak didn't. Who is he, anyway?"

"He's more or less in charge of Rupert. He's not Mr., he's Duke."

"Rupert? Is that the Prince who is engaged to Miss Leigh?"

"Yes."

"I met her last night. She's fascinating-looking."

Barney nodded. "You won't worry about things, will you?"

"Not if you say I shouldn't."

"And you'll keep on loving me?"

"Always."

He glanced restively toward the hall. "Who's at home?"

"Miss Laforge-Leigh. She's in her rooms. She sat all morning in the living room. Just sat. I haven't seen Miss Leigh."

"Oh."

"I wish you weren't so darn melancholy. You weren't like that in Mayville."

Barney smiled. "I'm sorry. That's the way life is. Sometimes it's Mayville but most of the time it's Philadelphia."

"I thought city people were always gay and frivolous."

"Sing for me," Barney said.

She went to the piano. "Do you believe I dare?"

"Why not? Nobody has sung in this house for years."

"That doesn't make it any easier. What shall I sing?"

"Anything. Sing 'Who?' Sing 'Moanin' Low.' Sing 'Three Little Words.' I don't care."

She played a few chords. He settled in his chair so that he could look at her without moving. For a long time she played and sang softly, one song after another.

Once he said, "God, you have a beautiful voice." Then he remembered Daisy Storey. A reason for that voice. His body ached. He half closed his eyes. A vast *weltschmerz* possessed him. His thoughts dwelt on remote things of great aspect--skies and winds, the stars at night, the sea.

Then she giggled. She leaned forward and began to sing,

*"Through the dark of night,
I've got to go where you are . . .
Through the fire and smoke,
I've got to go where you are . . .
Chloe!"*

She interrupted herself. "Miss Laforge-Leigh's name is Chloe, isn't it?" she sang again: "Chloe! "

Barney laughed. He went to the piano and kissed her. She took her hands from the keys. Silence reentered the room. His arms drew them together. Minutes passed ecstatically.

"Ah, there!"

They separated quickly. Muriel stood in the doorway. She held a cocktail glass in her hand. She smiled gaily and sipped from it. "Excuse the interruption. I came down to see why the concert had stopped. Why didn't you tell me you could sing, Miss Jamison?"

Janet had blushed crimson. "It isn't anything--"

"Nonsense. You're a wow. You have everything. How come you have such a drag with

the nightingale, Barney? How come you know her at all? Muriel is nonplussed."

"Why--"

Muriel waved her hand. "No alibis needed. I can guess. Go home, big boy. I want to talk to your girl friend."

Barney and Janet looked at each other. Muriel came into the room. She fingered one of Barney's lapels. "Seriously and not meaning to be rude. If you beat it, I'll do you a favor. A big favor."

Barney frowned at her. "You're tight as a tick."

"Any objections?"

"No. But--"

"Let Muriel do it all. She knows best. Onward, Christian soldier. I've got to talk to our Janet."

"Maybe you'd better," Janet said.

Barney locked his jaws. "All right. I'll go." He returned from the hall with his hat. "I can be reached at my house."

He slammed the door. What right had Muriel to break in? Why did Janet want him to go? He stalked along the street. He was embarrassed. He was furious at himself. Never had he lived through a more unsatisfactory day.

In the house, Muriel shouted from the foot of the stairs. "Irene! Bring down that cocktail shaker."

The maid appeared with it. "Where's Chloe?"

"Still in her room, Miss Leigh."

"Well, don't let her sneak downstairs." She turned to Janet. "Want a drink? Well, sit down, anyway. I'm sorry I was rude to your boy friend. How'd you meet him?"

"In Mayville."

"I suspected something like that. How long ago?"

"Ten days. No. Eight."

"Exactly. He went out where you lived and accidentally met you. Know why?"

"No."

Muriel drained her glass and filled it again. "I'll tell you. Because you're me. And I, in a manner of speaking, am you."

"I don't quite understand."

"Of course not. We're going for a boat ride, you and I. And I am going to be the glass in the bottom. Through me you can see everything. Why'd Chloe bring you here? I figured that out a few minutes ago. Listen. You're Jonathan Leigh's daughter."

"I'm what?"

"Leigh's daughter. I'm only an impostor. A fake. When you and I were about four months old or something like that, Chloe switched us. Brilliant, eh? Your mother, who was Leigh's wife, took you abroad when you were a baby. Chloe went with you. Your mother--by the way, you look just like her--was washed overboard. Chloe hated your mother. When the ship landed in France, she found me, I happened to be a distant relative--of hers. She brought me back and said I was you and she had you adopted in Cleveland."

"Buffalo."

"So it was. Buffalo."

Janet said nothing. She trembled a little.

Muriel drank again. "Jonathan Leigh died. He must have guessed there was something

fishy about me. He must have dropped a hint in his will, because the Averys wouldn't read it. Instead, they very obviously hunted you out. But they never told you anything, did they?"

"No," Janet whispered. "He never said anything."

"They probably wanted to see if you were worth fighting for."

"Fighting for?"

"Sure. Leigh's money is yours. Only they have to prove it."

"Oh."

"Well--where was I? Oh, yes. Why did Chloe bring you here? That stumped me for a while. It was the inspiration in the gin that brought light. Chloe must have told Valak. They're thick as thieves anyway and she's been getting pretty moldy because Avery wouldn't probate my ex-father's will. Valak is out for the Leigh fortune. Wants to get it for Sabria--which my marriage to--my marriage would accomplish automatically. When she told Valak the truth he probably decided to put you out of the picture. Valak doesn't stop for trifles. And you were a trifle to him.

"That would end Avery's case. He must have told Chloe. And she got cold feet and went to Mayville and nabbed you first."

Janet stared unspeaking at the other girl. Muriel chuckled. "Chloe always bit off more than she could chew. A very apt vulgarism, if you'll pardon it. Anyway--that's the way I figured it out. I may be wrong. But it fits together. And here we are!"

Janet watched her drink again. Her thoughts were in an indescribable turmoil. From it emerged one idea.

"Why did you tell me all this? You shouldn't have. I'm positive I'm not supposed to know. And--I can't see why you, of all people, should be the one--"

"You think it's generous of me?"

"More than that--"

Muriel rose. She swayed a little. "There is no generosity in my soul, young lady. None. I am hard and cruel. I told you and I will tell everyone simply--simply--" and her expression became distorted--"simply because when I go down, darling, Chloe is going still lower, so help me God. I hate her guts!" Suddenly she began to laugh hysterically.

A few minutes later she controlled herself. Her eyes were glazed. "Will you forget this little interlude?" she asked thickly.

"Of course."

"Not like me. It's the gin. Must be bad." She rose unsteadily. For a moment she saw Janet clearly. "You don't look very happy."

"Oh!" Janet said.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Shall I help you upstairs?"

"No. What's the matter?"

"Did Barney know that I was--who I am--when he went to Mayville?"

Muriel frowned and shook her head. "I don't--oh. You mean did he know you were going to get all this money? Sure. He knew. That is what I was speaking to him about when he left." She shook her head again. "Call Irene. I've got to go to my room."

Janet went out into the hall. She watched Muriel as she slowly climbed the stairs. Then she sat down at the piano. Tears streamed from her eyes.

Valak sent for the Prince. Rupert had strewn his room with cigarette stubs. The Duke nodded toward a chair. He spoke with sharp emphasis.

"It is absolutely necessary to Sabria that we do not lose this fortune no matter what it may cost us in face. I have cablegrams every day--"

"I know," Rupert said.

"There is only one logical thing for you to do."

"And that is?"

"I have decided that Chloe's case will not hold water against Avery's. It is too precarious. You must immediately lay plans to court the other girl. You must marry her as soon as appearances will allow. Of course, it will be obvious. But greater things than mere conventions are at stake. There is absolutely no alternative except failure, which is unthinkable. Miss Jamison is a very charming person. Not as sophisticated as Miss Leigh, but charming. I would suggest--"

Rupert rose. "Please say no more."

"You cannot refuse. It is logic--and logic is necessary at this time in spite of feelings. Make Miss Leigh your--"

"Motvia! "

"Pardon me, Your Highness, but--"

Rupert walked from the room without speaking again.

CHAPTER XVI

Dusk had fallen rapidly. It increased the tangible gloom of the spacious chamber where Janet sat, blotting out first the farthest corners and at last overcoming one by one the various objects of furniture. Her forehead rested on the polished wood of the music rack. Her legs were bent under the piano stool.

The aching wheels of her mind turned slowly. The knowledge that she was the daughter of Jonathan Leigh and his heiress had no literal significance. It was about Barney that she thought with tragic concentration. Each minute act of his in Mayville took on a new color. It was no coincidence that he had met her father before he walked into Dorman's. There was no Rittenhouse Company. And love, love, love--

With one hand she played minor chords. Pressing down the keys became an effort. Her back ached. She had stopped crying. Tears that last longer than normal laughter are as affected or as hysterical; and not weeping was a more poignant agony than any physical exhibition of racking grief.

Irene came in and switched on the lights. "Dinner will be served in fifteen minutes."

"Dinner? "

"Dinner, mademoiselle."

Janet walked up the stairs. Chloe's door was shut. Muriel's. Dinner. She smiled a little. Her dinner served in her house by her butler. Barney. And Barney wanted the dinner and the house and the butler and Barney took her because she came with it all. Because she was the string on which all the other things were drawn from the fecund grab bag of life.

She went into the bathroom--her bathroom--and washed her face Rouge on her lips. Powder on her nose. A comb run through her bright hair. Dinner. She could conjure up no loyalty to Barney in the face of such enormous reasons. When she looked up from the mirror her treacherous nerves flashed bright lights before her eyes. Dinner. You sit in front of sparkling glass and shining silver, lifting things from your plate. Dinner. People's voices come to you

hollowly and you answer into space. Dinner.

Muriel opened her door as Janet passed. Her face was sheet-white, but a sharp illumination in her eyes showed that the cocktails had lost their effect. She leaned against the wall.

"Hello, Janet."

"Coming down to dinner?"

"Why not? Food keeps you alive. Why?"

Janet did not answer. Muriel stared at her. "Did I shock you this afternoon?"

"Very much."

"Come with me."

They walked down the hall to the farthest door. When Muriel opened it Janet was conscious of an immense void in the darkness behind it. Muriel stepped over the threshold. Janet, her skin suddenly tingling, followed. It was pitch dark and soundless until a single bulb in a wall lamp burned instantaneously. Then she saw. Books. Around three sides of the room and reaching to the lofty ceiling were books. There were sets of books. There were huge books bound in tooled leather that lay on their sides. There was a section bright with the jackets of recent novels. At one end of the room a cavernous fireplace with a smoke-stained mantel. There was bronze and porcelain. Chinese tables. A mighty chest. A ship's model, the wood of which had been penetrated by immemorial worms. Such a room belonged in the deserted museum of a forgotten civilization; it was like history itself; it was impersonal and yet generically human; it would have seemed the property of no single individual except for the deep leather chair near the fireplace--one's eyes came to rest on the scuffed arms and the peaceful indentation from which, apparently, a leisure-loving sitter had but recently risen.

Janet did not require Muriel's words. "This was father's--your father's library."

Such words only increased the suddenly born consciousness of her father as a person. She waited a long time. "What was he like?"

Muriel shrugged. "Like this, I imagine. Hidden opulence--mentally, socially, every way. Maybe he was a grand egg. I don't know. With you instead of me I expect he would have been. Anyway--he's been laid away with the dusty tragedies."

"Oh."

"Here's something." Muriel unstopped a carafe and smelled it. "Brandy. You need a brandy to come in here and four or five to stay. Want some?"

"No, thank you."

"Sacrilege? "

"Oh--no."

Muriel wiped out a glass with her handkerchief. The liquor made eerie music as it issued from the bottle. "Funny about this room." She lifted the glass. "Luck!" She drank and shuddered. "You can't hear anything that goes on in the rest of the world. Not screams, not murmurs--which can be heard farther in still places. Father was like that. Your father." She poured another drink. "Did I frighten you this afternoon? Sit down."

Janet hesitated and sat on a stool. Muriel dropped into the leather chair.

"I wasn't frightened."

The dark girl smiled. "You wouldn't be. I know your type. I envy it. You're healthy. A rose, what? Barney will find that word for you."

Janet turned pale so quickly that the other girl was startled. Then she said, "Oh, my God, I forgot!" abruptly. "Here. Drink some."

Janet shook her head.

"I completely forgot my promised favor to Barney. That damn gin worked too fast." Muriel collected her thoughts. "I'm a fool. I've probably spoiled the afternoon of young love. I meant to bawl hell out of you as soon as I got through with an outline of Chloe's misdemeanors. This profanity, by the by, is a defense against the spirit world. Take it either way. To go on. Barney--"

"I'd rather not talk about him."

"You'll babble about him inside the hour. Now, listen. I can read your mind as if it were a primer--which it is. You think that your boy friend went out to Mayville to get your money."

"I--"

"Don't interrupt. You do. If you have the intelligence of a gnat you can't believe anything else. Well, it isn't so. Use your head instead of your stomach--the seat of the emotions, incidentally. When he went to Mayville he didn't know that you weren't pimply and a flannel nightgown wearer. How could he? He found that you were Miss Ohio in person. And, being Barney, he went into an outside loop. Remember, I know him better than you do. After that, being completely gaga, it dawned on him that when the time came to tell you the good news, it would make him look like the villain of the piece. I could see it printed on his face this afternoon."

"He was worried about something," Janet said softly.

"Right. He was worried. And that something is the scenario I've just outlined. He was about to guillotine himself."

"Then why didn't he tell me in Mayville?"

"Because, my dear child, the Leigh affairs cannot be arranged or rearranged by a word or two of truth. He couldn't prove you were Leigh's daughter--or he would have done so long ago. He was just investigating. And I imagine that he is still working on the problem."

"You mean--all you said this afternoon--"

"Is true, but legally obscure. Chloe did a good job of swapping you and me. She probably has a nice set of alibis. Barney's father has to break them down--or little Muriel gets the bank account all for herself."

Janet hunched her shoulders and folded her hands around her knees. "Then, there's just one thing for me to do. I'll sign a--a what do you call it? A disclaimer. I don't want all this."

Muriel sighed. "God, you're pure. Well--it's a privilege to know that purity still lives. Unfortunately, it's not so simple. Your boy friend was probably forbidden by his father to tell you about yourself. No wonder he's nervous."

"Still--if he really loved me--"

"If he loved you he probably forgot all about who you were. Love makes you nutty. Love had something to do with the session of truth-blurting I had this afternoon. You won't understand that and I'm not sure that I do myself. I avoid introspection as, much as possible--which, in my case, is very little. Anyway, Barney probably woke up one bright morning to find out that he had hung himself. Hence the wild look. Hence the crazy behavior."

"If I could be sure of that--"

"My dear child! I've lived in this town for many, many years. I know the ins, the outs, the ups and the downs. Barney is cream. He is *he*. He is something. Nobility clings to him. He'll be a rotten lawyer. Why? Because he wouldn't have had the duplicity to think of such a swell get-rich-quick scheme as marrying you. He's too naive. I've seen him around town. He fancies himself as a hard old cynic looking at the world through weary Yale eyes in which there is a

touch of Harvard Law School. It's silly. A good mirror would go through him like an X-ray. If the Avery honor and the Laforge honor were put on a balance together, the Avery honor would throw the other into the reaches of space. Solid. That's what Philadelphia thinks it is--and the Averys are almost the only relics of the source of that now vain aspiration."

"That makes me feel pretty small," Janet said in a tone inclined rather toward expansiveness.

"Ah. Never feel small. Never allow yourself to feel small. The smaller you get in your own eyes, the quicker people are to see it. A paradox of the first water, so help me." Muriel smiled evanescently. She poured a third drink. "The truth is--I envy you. You two. If there is a golden youth--you're it. I see your marriage bed. Knowledge enough to make you ecstatic and not yet a burden of knowledge. If people only knew where to stop learning! That difficult point that leaves a few facts unknown and thereby makes room for philosophy. This is potent liquor my father--your father--"

"Our father."

"Our father was in the habit of drinking. It goes to the tongue." She drained the glass. Suddenly she grasped Janet's shoulders. "Do you believe me?"

"I--"

"You've got to believe me. Got to."

"It would make me very happy to believe you."

"And most people are happy only when they believe lies. God, child, you're lucky. Swear you believe me."

"I want to talk--"

"I said swear. Think of Barney. Think of him! You're a slut to doubt him." Her fingers pressed into Janet's flesh.

"That's true. I--I swear, then. But you shouldn't take the trouble—I--"

"Don't cry. Stop it! I'm not taking trouble. I have a certain person in mind who is going to suffer--" Her voice rose.

Janet stood. "I'm going."

Muriel smoothed her hair with both hands--a gesture almost masculine. "We'd better. It's dinner time." She glanced around the library. "There was one thing--"

Muriel crossed to a painting which was covered by a heavy drapery. She drew back the cloth. It revealed the portrait of a woman and her resemblance to Janet was so great that she could not forbear an exclamation.

"That's Daisy Storey."

"My mother."

Muriel nodded. "I think this portrait is the best proof of what I've told you about yourself that you could have. You look alike--exactly." She allowed the other girl to stare for a long time. In the last few hours Janet had learned that she was no longer an orphan. Now, seeing her mother's portrait, the weight of that truth became ponderable. By and by she turned away silently and reluctantly.

They walked to the door. Muriel reached up to the wall bracket. Once, very slowly, her eyes traveled around the library. She turned the switch and in the darkness she whispered, "Ah, there, ghost!" Janet almost leaped into the hall.

The three women sat at the dinner table. Severance stood in the background. One of the candles guttered in a draft from the front hall.

Muriel stared intensely at Chloe.

"You're positively pasty tonight, auntie."

The hard blue eyes sparkled. "Your own complexion, my dear niece, is none too permanent."

Muriel clapped her hands. "Touché!"

Janet looked at one and then the other. A nascent gladness in her was running like subterranean water through the rocks of circumstance which locked her in. Such bitterness was very far away. That she was anything but a guest still seemed impossible.

"Boned squab," Severance said.

Muriel smirked at Chloe. "How perfect! And once the bones are taken away, see how flabby it becomes! You can mash it with a fork. I know an old lady who is kept upright entirely by whalebone. In her corset, you know. And she could never keep up with the fashions because she had to wear a choker--with whalebone in it, too." Chloe put her hand to her throat and pulled at her high collar. "She'd collapse without it, you know. And then there was another old lady who had to have her vertebrae spliced together. She had arthritis--no--Pott's disease--I think. That kept her together till she stooped over to pick up a pin. 'See a pin, pick it up and all the day you'll have good luck.' That sort of thing. Only it must have been the wrong kind of pin. Because she fell all apart."

Chloe said nothing and Muriel went on. "I'll give you your answer. 'Some other people--young ones--are born in pieces. They never get entirely assembled. A piece in Paris. Another in Philadelphia. They spend their old age trying to make ends meet.' That's your answer."

The mottling on the older woman's face was clearly discernible. Janet racked her brain for something to say. She guessed the exact exquisiteness of Muriel's innuendo. Her feeling toward Chloe at the moment was one almost of compassion.

"Severance, I'd like a little wine."

"Yes, Miss Leigh? What variety--?"

"Amontillado. "

"I fear that--"

"Poe used it all up? Quite so. And it was a good wine. Just the thing for such a meal, you know. An accompaniment to an intriguing emotional symphony. Poe used it for that too, if you'll remember."

"I'm afraid, Miss Leigh, that I can't quite--"

"Never mind, Severance. Have we any Guinea red?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Chablis," Muriel said.

"Yes, Miss Leigh."

The wine was brought in a long basket. Glasses had been put at their places. Severance poured a little into a fourth glass and then filled the three goblets. Muriel held it to the light. She nodded to Janet, who lifted her glass. Chloe glanced at them and continued to eat.

Muriel seemed to be thinking of a toast, perhaps of a number of toasts. Finally she said, "Down the hatch."

Janet sipped the wine. She had never tasted anything like it. She was not sure whether she cared for it or not. It was like glimpses she had had of the house, of the Leighs, of their life. It hinted at numerable things unknown, the learning of which could not be accomplished without the loss of something very real. If one likes dry wine one never cares for sweet. That might have been the inarticulate moral.

Then Muriel asked it as a question. "Like the Chablis?"

"I'm not sure."

"It wouldn't pay to get to the point where you are certain." The door-bell rang faintly from the interior of the house. "Hello! Company?"

Severance came in from the hall. "His Grace, the Duke--"

"Have him wait," Chloe said. "And--bring the coffee. I don't care for any dessert."

"Look!" Muriel said. "You've spilled the salt."

A silver shaker lay on its side. Salt poured from it, making a little pyramid on the tablecloth. Chloe hastily set it upright. "Throw it over your left shoulder, auntie," Muriel said.

Chloe's hand twitched, but she did not follow the advice. Instead, she drank her demitasse hastily and left the room. The dark and demoniac grin of her niece followed her.

"Why God put a brain in a thing like that--"

"She's old," Janet said mildly.

"Drink your wine, child. This is going to be an evening. You'll need it."

Valak, in the living room, was talking earnestly to Chloe. "I've looked at every facet of the problem, Miss Laforge-Leigh. And I've come to you because I must know the precise details of the—adoption--of both girls. It is going to be difficult to carry off the marriage of Rupert and Muriel. Impossible, perhaps." He sighed. "I cannot, evidently, avoid it even by what might seem a wiser plan."

The door-bell rang again. Muriel and Janet looked up from their mousse. Chloe started. Valak lifted his eyebrows. Severance presently came to Janet.

"Mr. Avery to see you."

"Barney? "

"The young Mr. Avery. Shall I show him to the music room?"

"If you please."

Muriel drank in Janet's expression. "Remember what I told you. Don't be too female about it."

"You'll excuse me?"

"I never mind solitude--relieved by Chablis."

Barney smiled at her nervously, apologetically. "I had to come back. The afternoon has been unendurable."

Janet bit her lip. She wanted to comfort him. She wanted to remove the lines on his forehead, the quick, repetitive motions of his hands. At the same time, remembering her unhappy vigil in the twilight, she wanted him to feel what she had felt and the latter and more unreasonable desire prevailed.

"Won't you play something for me again?" he said.

"I don't feel like playing."

"Poor Janet!"

"Maybe I'm not so poor."

He was momentarily startled. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing."

"Oh." She sat down on a Windsor settee and he took a place at her side.

"I'm crazy about you," he said with the quiet monotony of one who expresses a perpetual thought.

"Why?"

"You're different tonight."

"Am I?"

"What did Muriel want to tell you this afternoon?"

"Oh--things."

"What things?"

"Just--things about the Leigh family."

"Oh."

"And about you."

"Me?"

"Yes. How proud your family was. How proud you were. All about where you went to school and what people thought of you. You're quite important in Philadelphia, aren't you?"

"Not very," he answered.

She smiled. "Tell me something."

"Anything on earth you want--" he checked himself.

"How does it happen that a person like you--with all your money and social position and your name--should fall in love with a poor little hick like myself?"

Barney's eyes were ardent. "There are plenty of answers to that. One of them is--look in the mirror. That's not the right one. It's just--you. The way you were in that store in Mayville. The way you took me to look for building sites. The more I say the sillier it will sound. Why do I love you? Because I think you're swell. Because you set me thinking of what life married to you would be--and you're the one girl who has started that particular train of thought in my mind. For all the conventional reasons and for a number of reasons of my own. Because--"

Janet was content with his answer and his attitude. But she did not show her contentment. There was not the slightest suggestion of inward satisfaction in her terse interruption:

"You're sure it's not at all because I am the Leigh heiress?"

Barney never forgot that simple sentence. No words he had ever heard in his life had given him a more sudden or profound shock. His physical manifestations were slight. He may have flinched a little. But human beings react a hundred times more violently to the prick of a pin than they would to the august crack of doom. When he spoke, softly, vehemently, he said only, "No, dear."

He could not have chosen a better answer. It undammed all her pent-up jubilation. They were in each other's arms before they stopped to wonder or explain. It was after a long interval that in small and careful voices they explored devious reasons and motives.

"Muriel told me that," she said.

And--"I had to promise Chloe not to let you know in order to see you at all."

"Why didn't you tell me in Mayville?"

"Because father forbade it." Barney explained the strange will. He described his errand in detail. Janet laughed.

"You mean, you went back and hunted around in the mud for my footprint?"

"That's just what I did. And then I was just able to wash in time to take you to church."

"I'd have dropped dead if I had known what you were doing--and why."

"You can imagine how I felt. I was in love with you before I had even settled down to the business of identifying you."

"Honestly?"

"Absolutely. And then it dawned on me that I looked more like a fortune hunter than Captain Kidd. Lord, I've been miserable."

"I'll make it up."

"You've already made it up."

Kisses. Silences. During one of the rhapsodic stillnesses Severance opened the front door and escorted Rupert to Muriel's suite. They scarcely noticed that someone had entered the house. Later on their mood changed slowly. Barney's conscience began to function.

"What are we going to do about it?"

Janet smiled at him. "You've got to figure that out."

He shook his head. "No one can. Father can't. Everything is in a perfectly insane state."

"I know. That is, I'm beginning to know."

"We can't help you very much. I guess--I've spoiled your case."

"How?"

"By loving you. Even if you don't believe I was trying to get your money--everyone else will."

"But why don't we just let the case drop?"

"That's what I've wondered."

Janet shook her head. "I have a feeling we won't be able to do it. Muriel won't let us."

"Muriel?"

"She has only one idea--to drag down Miss Laforge-Leigh."

"And herself," he said grimly.

"She's not thinking about herself any more--not directly. She has a terrible courage. I think she's grand."

"You don't know her as well as I do. You don't know as much about her--"

"I think," Janet said, "that I probably know her a great deal better than you do."

Barney stood and took a cigarette from his pocket. He had a habit of producing a single cigarette as if he kept them loose in his clothes. When he was excited, they emerged in a continual stream. "Maybe you do," he said. "But that's not the point. Our troubles--yours and mine--haven't really started."

"I thought that they were all over."

Barney laughed. Sheer reaction to the acute suffering he had undergone unstrung his nerves. "That's our trouble. We're like children. We're avoiding every main issue. Your money--"

"My money! I can't think of it as my money. All of a sudden--before dinner--it dawned on me that all these things belonged to me. This house. The servants. The food that was eaten here--at least in theory it was mine. If I hadn't been so worried about you I would have died from fright or laughter, I don't know which."

"I know it. And I know I'm cross and crazy. Don't mind it, will you? If we could only just barge out and get married--"

"Well--?"

"We can't. I haven't the right. Father made that perfectly clear to me today."

"I suppose," Janet said thoughtfully, "that men are always thinking about duty--"

"Well? It involves everybody--"

"--and I presume they're right. But thinking about it only complicates it."

"Good Lord," he exclaimed, "we can't avoid the complications. It's the worst tangle I've ever heard of."

"I think it's quite simple."

Barney sighed. "Oh, my God! Well--never mind."

"You ought to go home and go to bed." "Sure," he said, "and leave everything to the good fairies."

"Are we quarreling, Barney?"
"We are." Abruptly, he grinned. "The most hopeful thing that has happened since Mayville."
Severance coughed at the doorway. "Telephone, Mr. Avery."
Barney was gone for several minutes. When he returned he said, "Father's coming over. Wants to meet you."
"That's lovely."
"Where's Chloe?"
"In the other front room--with Mr.--with the Duke."
"Valak?"
"He came in right after supper."
"Well, I'll be damned." He frowned thoughtfully and then shrugged. "I guess it doesn't matter. Anyway, you'll like my father."
"I know it."

CHAPTER XVII

Douglas Avery took her hand, chuckled, and said, "Well, well," a number of times. When he started to pay a compliment to her he perceived her resemblance to Daisy Storey, but his words did not falter. Barney was too impatient to let them talk long.

"She knows who she is, dad."

Avery's expression lost its casualness, but he showed no astonishment. "You told her son?"

"No. Muriel."

"By gad!" He remembered the girl in the room. "Of course, you realize that there is considerable uncertainty attached to your chances of inheritance?"

"Why can't I just ignore the whole thing? Let matters stand?"

Avery's brows lifted. "Splendid! Good for you!" He glanced at his son with a cryptic elation. "Bully!"

"Miss Leigh, of course, would be against it. But we might persuade her."

"How did she know?"

Barney answered his father. "Chloe to Valak. Valak to Rupert. Rupert to Muriel. And Muriel to Janet because Muriel is hell-bent on wrecking Chloe. She'll tell everybody in town if she isn't stopped."

"Where is she now?"

"In her room," Janet replied. "She's been drinking."

Avery shook his head. "Tough. Terrible thing. Still--if you're really sure that you don't want to inherit--of course, Leigh's will is to be considered--and Miss Laforge-Leigh deserves no consideration. Perhaps if we talked to Miss Leigh--"

Upstairs a door was opened noisily. They heard Muriel's voice: "Like hell you will!"

"She's coming down now," Barney said. They sat fixedly. Muriel appeared at the door. She was drunk, but not as drunk as she had been in the afternoon--or else her soul had carried her above the effects of alcohol.

"Evening, folks!" she said.

"Won't you come in, Miss Leigh?"

"I intended to. Come in, Rupert." The Prince appeared behind her. There were red spots on his cheek bones and his mouth was like straight wire. "You have not met these people. Miss Jamison--Mr. Avery--Barney, you know. Rupert of Sabria."

He bowed stiffly.

"A big, happy family," she said.

They sat down again. Avery cleared his throat. "This is, perhaps, a poor time for a discussion. But urgency overrides the mandates of polite custom." He addressed Muriel directly. "Miss Jamison has asked me to tell you, Miss Leigh, that she wishes to withdraw the--ah--claims which have been more or less indirectly made for her."

"She would," Muriel said bluntly. "That's the sort of person she is. My answer is applesauce."

Avery nodded. "Quite. I understand your feelings. Nevertheless, before you take any steps--such as publicity--might I be permitted to suggest that so much more than your own emotions is involved in this matter that you can scarcely--ah--prejudice yourself for mere rev--ah--justice. The Prince, for example--"

"Please, Mr. Avery," Rupert said.

The lawyer turned toward him. "I realize that this is unconventional. I appreciate keenly the position in which it has placed you. Yet you, too, are motivated by utterly unselfish factors. Your people--"

Rupert bowed again. "You are very generous, sir."

"Practical!" Avery answered sharply. "I insist on suggesting--"

Muriel shook her head stubbornly. "It's useless. I've made up my mind. In a few minutes I'm going in there--"

"In where?"

"In the other room. You can all come, if you like. I want you to hear what I have to say."

"It is futile," Avery responded. "Unwise."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. If you were in my shoes tonight--" Her voice died to a whisper and then she laughed sharply. "Come."

"Please, Miss Leigh."

Muriel stood. She lifted her chin. Her long, slender arm parted the draperies. "It won't take me long."

Rupert followed her. Avery lifted his eyebrows questioningly and his son nodded. "We better go," he said. Janet took his hand.

They filed through the portieres on the opposite side of the hall--Muriel, Rupert, Avery, and Barney holding Janet by the hand. They were taut and silent. They wore expressions of anticipation; Muriel's eyes gleamed--the rest seemed almost fearful. Chloe looked up with a toadlike stupidity that became rapidly a composition of anger and fear. The cleavage between herself and Valak was never more marked; his ends had been the same but now, in the presence of the material for almost any drama, any comedy or tragedy, any disharmonic symphony of emotions, his senses immediately quickened toward the human aspects of this perilous combination of people.

They waited with the fatalism of trees hearing storm-wind far away. In the hypnotic pause Janet sat on the arm of a chair. Valak lit a cigarette. Every eye moved transiently to the hissing match. Avery brushed cigar ash from his waistcoat and in his turn attracted mute attention. Only when Muriel spoke did the focus become purposeful.

"We all seem to be here," she said. She sighed and trembled a little. "I wanted to say a few things to you, Chloe."

Chloe swallowed. "I think any other time would be more advisable for conversation between us."

"Why?"

"Anything of a private nature"--she rubbed her hand across her mouth--"would be better said in private."

"I was thinking of things that could scarcely be considered of a private nature," Muriel answered.

Valak had now read into her motives. He said thoughtfully, "You are not forgetting that you are to become a princess in a short time, Miss Leigh?"

Her eyes touched him. "On the contrary," she said. Valak scowled. "Then I agree with Miss Laforge-Leigh--"

"Too late," Muriel answered.

In the three voices there had been no inflection of excitement. That fact gave respite. Everyone relaxed a little. Avery sat down and Valak leaned against the mantel. It seemed as if the storm might move around the group without touching them.

Muriel turned to Chloe again. "There are one or two things I would like to ask you, auntie. I think I have a right to know. First--"

"Some other time, please, dear."

"First, were my real mother and father married?"

Blood ran from cheeks. Chloe stiffened. "What are you talking about! Your father's marriage was international news."

Rupert took her arm. "Please let me take you to your room, Muriel."

She wrenched herself free. Again she faced Chloe. "Second, why were you such a fool as to let this girl"--she pointed to Janet--"go on living at all?"

Chloe shook her head. "She's drunk again."

Muriel pointed to Valak. "If you thought of killing her, why didn't you carry out the idea?"

He smiled blandly. "Miss Leigh, I will have to insist that you are removed to your rooms. Your mind is upset--" he darted a quick glance at Avery, who was staring at the chandelier--"and you're the victim of illusions. I can't imagine what you mean. It is absurd for us to listen to such nonsense."

The tall, dark girl spun a chair around so that it faced Chloe. She sat in it. Her voice cut through the silence. "You will all listen. If you don't, the newspapers will learn something that is ready for them now. Something you can't stop merely by interfering with me." Valak whistled softly. She did not look up. "If a human curse can damn another woman, Chloe, then my curse will plant you eternity-deep in hell." In the moments that followed, stunned and realizing the extent of their helplessness, they listened.

"There you sit like a fat goat trying to get out of the pen I've put around you. You can't now. For twenty years I've lived with you, listened to you, hated you, wondered about you. If there is a devil it will be a female and have your face. Long, long ago when I was too little to know the words--words you're still too stupid to understand--I could feel the hard lechery of your incestuous fixation on your brother.

"Jonathan Leigh made his exterior insensible just to keep from feeling your filthy tentacles upon it. It must have been born there in your girlhood when the premium on virtue and

the penalty on freedom was too great, when the materially avaricious did not care to risk those things for mere animal decency, when people like you locked up every decent desire only to have it sneak out through the back door of necessity and attach itself to rottenness. I can see your mind growing crooked as a coiled snake from that perversion.

"I give you credit for that much victimization. I like to think of your undefined ecstasy when you came here to live with your brother. I like better to think of your feelings when Daisy Storey came into his life. I hope it made you vomit-sick!"

Rupert gently touched Muriel. "Please come with me, darling."

She did not seem to hear him. Her eyes never left Chloe, who was staring back with hypnotized terror. "That day turned you into a shuddering old woman. Ugly minds like yours are quick to hate. They have no other defense because their wrongness is so flagrant. When they were married--oh, what a day that must have been for you! I can see you, smug and smiling and wishing them joy--and Lucifer, if he heard you, must have squirmed half in jealousy and half in regurgitative loathing.

"You may as well drop that apprehension. I'm going to tell all the story. The beautiful story of Chloe Laforge-Leigh. It would make a companion book to the Bible--a book of sins to avoid. Laforge. That was your next love. Sometimes I think how creepy and insidious you were. Sometimes I think you were so obvious--a stopped pipe that had always to back up somewhere carrying a tide of aging and ever more repugnant offal.

"Laforge. Characteristically unwilling to admit the incorruptibility of your brother, you found a solace in the generations behind you both. All his nobility was your mother's. All his peccability your father's. His sex assured the life of the name of Leigh. Your sex would only lose it. Your disposition toward this devious maidenhood was a further block.

"Yet you went on gulping down defamation. You were Daisy Storey's sycophant. You were good and helpful. Sweet Chloe! When she had a baby--a Leigh baby--you must have lain in a cold sweat every night. I wondered a moment ago why you didn't stoop to murder. But I know why. You tried merely to preserve and perpetuate yourself--only you tried in the wrong way. Murder was too dangerous to your safety. Then fate, or life, or whatever it is, played into your hands with a nice, reckless abandon. Daisy Storey fell sick--"

At that instant Valak stepped across the room and seized the girl by the shoulders. He shook her. "You idiot! "

"Let go of me."

"I'm going to take you to your room."

"I said--let go."

"I will not. We'll hear no more of this folly. You're the one who has been distorted. Come on." He turned her from the chair. Barney, his hands clenched, suddenly confronted them. "Take your hands off, Valak."

"Out of my way."

Barney swung his fist. It would have struck Valak squarely if Rupert had not intervened with a swift, reaching movement that was like sword-play.

"Easy, Avery!" he said.

Valak no longer held Muriel. She said: "Sit down. Don't you remember that I told you this whole thing would be public gossip tomorrow if you interfered with me?"

Valak spread his palms. "I appeal to you, Mr. Avery."

"I, have nothing to say. Sit down, son. That was a damn fool thing to do."

Muriel glanced at the Duke. "It's time for you to stop bluffing, Motvia."

"I'm sorry. I was trying only--"

Chloe had risen to her feet. "I am going now--"

Muriel deliberately pushed her back in her chair. "You are not going. Not now. Not until I am through. Listen. Listen, everybody. I'm going to tell you about a sea voyage. Give me a cigarette, Rupert. If you try to get away again, Chloe, your name will be a joke tomorrow. Daisy Storey was sick and her husband could not take her abroad although her doctor'd insisted that she go. She had a little baby and finally the baby went with her--and Chloe. Daisy Storey was washed overboard. And Chloe was left with the baby--which she hated more than mortal sin." Muriel glanced at Janet and smiled.

"The boat landed in France. At *Le Havre*. There was no other boat to take. Chloe went with the baby to Paris. She had to wait for several days. I've read all about this. There were--and still are--a dozen branches of the Laforge family in Paris and near it. My dear aunt wanted revenge for Daisy and she wanted with a comic desire to perpetuate her name which had more or less taken the place of her earlier attachment. She found a girl baby Laforge orphan. With her rotten French, her lousy manners, her decrepit intelligence she still managed to find some dirty little French peasant baby and she brought it back and gave it to Jonathan and told him it was his--and he never knew the difference. Who would? What man would? The new nurses it had had never seen the first child. It--"

Chloe suddenly shouted, "It's a lie!" at the top of her voice.

Valak said, "I suppose you can prove this?"

"Yes," Chloe repeated. "Prove it!"

Muriel leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes momentarily. Her energy was nearly gone.

There was not much more to say. Once again she leaned forward.

"I'm done with it all! There's no need of going over what has happened since. You tried to raise me as you had been raised yourself. Fortunately my flesh was too strong or my soul too feeble. You preached day and night your dirty gospel of appearances. A Laforge should look like this, and behave like that. Virtue. Virginity. Suavity. Manners. Clothes. Morals. My virtue stuck to me no longer than my childhood, thank God. My manners became the talk of the town. You picked out a husband for me and it is only by the grace of heaven that he was not a diseased old wreck with a chewed mustache and a fetid breath. It would have made no difference to you, Chloe. You'd have taken rottenness to your bridal bed calmly enough if you hadn't had the face of a horse and the hips of a rhinoceros. You'd have hugged a six foot spider to your bilious bosom if it had had a title. But even a spider wouldn't have cared to bite at your youth and beauty.

"For twenty years you tried to fix my life as you fixed Jonathan's. As you fixed Daisy's. Ah--God! I'll tell you what I think. You didn't push her into the sea--you hadn't the guts for it. She jumped. Your mind pushed her. That's all. I'm the French gutter-snipe. There's Jonathan Leigh's daughter--uncorrupted because she escaped you--an irony that will set the angels laughing!"

There was an appalling silence. "She's fainted!" Barney whispered.

Muriel's voice came weakly. "Get me a drink, somebody."

It was Valak who hurried to the cellarette and poured a glass of cognac. Muriel swallowed it. Then she gazed into the hollow faces. The Duke bent over her smiling sardonically. Rupert sat with his face in his hands. Barney had his arm around Janet. Chloe sat like a heap of explosive with a smoldering fuse. Avery had closed his eyes.

Valak straightened, glanced around the room, and said, "I think you will all agree with me that she has quite an elaborate phobia."

"I do not agree," Avery said.

"Ah?"

"If you will examine the hospital records made at the time of the birth of Jonathan Leigh's daughter, you will find that a footprint was taken at birth."

Chloe surged upright. "Get out of my house! All of you. Go! Leave me. Severance!" She lurched toward the bell pull.

"Sit down," Avery said coldly. "Are you sure it is your house?"

"Oh!" Chloe groaned.

"A footprint was taken of Leigh's rightful daughter at the time of birth. I have a copy. I also have footprints of Miss Leigh and of Miss Jamison. The baby print is duplicated by Miss Jamison's."

A sigh escaped Valak.

Chloe's eyes embraced the room. She began to talk in a high, whining voice. "You are all against me. I have done my best and like all self-sacrificial people I am rewarded by hate. You have plotted to take my fortune away from me and from my brother's daughter. Even she, hating me unnaturally, has been so impregnated with this plot of yours that she believes it.

"You're a shrewd man, Douglas Avery. You've done your best to ruin an old woman. You found this girl I was interested in. You even found her baby footprint. You've ascribed it to Leigh's daughter. You will even stand up in court and say that I exchanged babies--while what I was really doing was sacrificing my own peace and comfort for my sister-in-law and my niece. You will make it sound like the truth. Even little Muriel will blaspheme herself and bring ruin upon herself just to satisfy her hatred of me. But I will fight you! With all the God-given strength of outraged womanhood, I will fight!

"Oh, I can see through you. If heaven gives me strength I will make others see your infamy. You want to establish this unfathered and unmothered girl as a Leigh. Then your son, who has hung upon her lips ever since you completed your plan, will marry her--will marry poor, dead Jonathan's money.

How rotten you are, Douglas Avery, to listen to this black ingrate call me rotten and not to utter one word of protest! "

In the quiet that followed they could hear Valak's fingers drumming on the mantel. Then Chloe began to sob.

Avery spoke. "Would it interest you to hear Leigh's will?" The sobbing stopped instantly. "What was it?" she asked. "I cannot remember the precise words. I shall skip the preliminaries. It goes something like this:

"I bequeath to my rightful daughter, Muriel Storey Leigh, all my properties, moneys, estates and possessions, subject to the following conditions--First, that, in the event of her marriage to Rupert of Sabria the amount of her dowry be excepted from my estate; second, that an annuity of twenty-five thousand dollars be set aside for my sister; third, that the identity of my daughter, Muriel, shall be formally ascertained previous to the probating of this will.' That is the important part. I and my firm became executors."

Chloe was staring into space. "He said that about establishing Muriel's identity?"

Avery nodded. "And, with the will, he left the footprint and Miss Jamison's Mayville address."

Her voice was empty and toneless. "Then--all these years--while I have been with him--

he has known--"

"That you had cheated him," Avery finished.

Chloe remembered her position. "It's a lie!"

"I'm afraid you have given yourself away," Avery snapped.

"That's duress, Avery," Valak said.

But Chloe was still partially defenseless. Her mind went back to the past. The past during which she had lived believing that she had outwitted her brother in taking her revenge. Now the truth was overcoming her. She realized that Jonathan had always known what she had done, that pride in his name, pride in her name, a fierce defense of her--unreasoning and abstract--had kept his heart sealed. Her brother had been almost inhumanly kind to her. She had gloried and gloated in her secret. It had inflated her every conscious hour. Now she knew that there had never been a secret. Jonathan had defended her even against himself and his dearest possessions. Her Jonathan. The brother whom she had worshipped secretly, who dismayed and frightened her, who roused every evil passion in her because there could be none but evil passions. He had known! All those years, he had glimpsed her triumph, swallowed it, tolerated it. His life opened out before her like a valley seen from an unexpected hilltop. The silences, the aloofness, the taciturnity. Days in the great library. Weeks of retreat from the world. Silence.

It broke Chloe. "I did it," she said simply. "It's all true."

Valak lit another cigarette. Muriel began to laugh. Avery turned away, muttering under his breath.

Chloe sat inert. There was no more cold fire in her eyes. It was as if life had finished its course in her.

Barney walked to the cellarette and poured a drink for himself with trembling fingers.

"If you will be good enough to give me time to leave Philadelphia," Chloe said. "I will be obliged."

"And I would like to leave," Muriel said.

Valak glanced at Rupert. "Perhaps we, also--"

The Prince turned his eyes away. They had filled brimful.

"There is no need for such haste--" Avery began.

Valak was at Rupert's side. "His Highness begs leave to depart. He is thinking of his people--"

Those things were said in tired, commonplace voices. They were prompted by habits and manners. Actually everyone in the room was stunned and exhausted. An acid had at last been found which ate through the vitreous surface of Chloe Laforge-Leigh, she had crumbled, and there was nothing left. A fat old body, a soul that had become a whispering ghost. A thing that would talk to itself and move through dusty rooms leaning on a cane. The six little words of her confession had more impact than the most disastrous human explosion conceivable.

They stood in the room hesitantly, their eyes avoiding the chair where she sat. Something of a smile on Valak's face, as if the artistry of a tragedy he had witnessed had surpassed its depressive effect. Rupert in misery. Barney uncertain, his father rapt.

The Prince ended his moment with an audible breath. He stepped forward and bowed.

"I wish to take my leave of you all," he said. He took Muriel's hand and pressed it to his lips. She did not look at him.

CHAPTER XVIII

He might have gone and made an end to what many people would have called forever afterward "everything." Certainly it appeared that the events had left the actors stupefied.

Then Janet spoke. Her voice was quiet and intense. It represented an emerging of many things. Through her came the temper and intelligence of her father, the nobility of her mother. In her spoke a heritage of which Chloe had always boasted and which Chloe had never exhibited. Janet played the last part in the drama that had taken place in the great room--and it was logical that she should play the part. She was the daughter and heir; in her ran the blood and to her had come the estates.

"Wait."

The Prince halted.

"This house, the Leigh estates, the name, everything that belonged to my father is mine." It was a statement and yet Avery, whom she faced, felt that she wished his assent.

"It is."

"Disposal is my right."

"It is."

"What is the value, in money, of all of it?"

Avery had scarcely expected that question. He cogitated. "I couldn't say with exactitude. Your father's estate is worth about forty-five millions."

No one spoke for a moment. Janet's mind ran on a fresh tangent. She addressed Muriel.

"Have you already sent something about this to the newspapers?"

"No." Muriel ground out a cigarette and lit another. "I hinted that I had just to make you listen to me."

"Is there any reason why anything should be sent? Couldn't this whole matter be kept a secret by ourselves?"

Avery answered. "I think that is very generous, Miss Jami--Miss Leigh." Rupert stepped to Janet. "If it were possible, both my father and myself would be humbly grateful."

"Miss Laforge-Leigh?" Janet looked at her aunt.

Chloe spoke in a voice barely audible. "I would never speak to a soul--"

"Your Grace?" His head shook. "Muriel? You, Barney? Mr. Avery?"

"It robs you of a rightful publicity," Avery said.

"I'll waive my right to it." Janet faced the Prince. "You may rest assured that any—embarrassment--that would be caused by publication of the truth will be spared you."

"Thank you."

Daisy Storey's daughter hesitated. What she was about to do was as dramatic as what Muriel had done. It was motivated by kindness instead of a desire for revenge at any cost. Her manner of performing it was diametrically opposite to Muriel's. She needed no stimulant. Her voice was low and clear, not uneven and raucous. She walked to Muriel's chair and stood there for an instant. The beauty of both girls and the contrast between them was vivid in that pause.

"I shall return to you at once just half of what I have inherited." She looked up. "You will see to that, Mr. Avery." Her eye met Barney's. If she had needed a test of his love, that pronouncement would have sufficed. Barney did not move or speak but his eyes were hot with a deep ecstasy.

No one moved. A clock ticked. Chloe had popped open her eyes. Valak was twisting his

mustache.

Muriel spoke almost sleepily and at the end of a profound silence. "No, thanks."

"I insist."

Muriel's eyes were lifted and they rested on the white face of the Prince, whose emotion in those minutes must have been well-nigh intolerable. She shook her head.

"I still insist."

Barney had been leaning against the wall. Now, with a shove of his shoulders, he moved toward Muriel's chair. On his face was half of a grin.

"You've got to be thinking of the starving Sabrians, Muriel, old kid. Twenty-two million rocks will keep Janet in bonbons. She isn't stripping herself. Besides, there's my salary for her to rely on. Seventy-five a week."

Muriel smiled faintly and took Barney's hand. She was like a person weakened by illness. "Kind of you, Barney."

His grin did not fade. "I'll bring the papers around in the morning."

At that moment Valak, overcome by the tension, joined the pair beside Muriel. The nearness of his grasp upon twenty-two million dollars was more than he could bear. He discounted his past scheming. He ignored the fact that he had so recently planned to murder Janet. He counted, perhaps, on the overwrought state of the people in the room to make them forget the truth about himself.

"You must accept," Valak said with tremulous eagerness. "Sabria depends--"

"Valak!" It was Rupert's voice. He, at least, had not forgotten the duplicity of Motvia. The intrusion of the Duke at this hour was more than Rupert could bear. His face was white and angry. He had witnessed Janet's generosity. He had remembered Valak's various schemes, and Rupert of Sabria was a gentleman.

"But--" Valak said.

It was enough. It fired Rupert's anger. He fought forwards, fought for self-control. When he spoke it was in a withering blast of Sabrian. No one understood, but everyone could see Valak's face grow ghastly pale. His knees trembled beneath him. He twitched and swallowed. When Rupert finished, Valak removed a medal that hung round his neck on a red ribbon and handed it to the young man. Then, slowly, he left the room.

Again there was silence. A door slammed.

"What did you do, Rupert?"

Muriel asked the question.

Rupert was standing as stiff as steel. He spoke metallically. "I banished him. From my presence and from Sabria. I disenfranchised him and destroyed his titles. Forever. Now—good-bye."

He turned.

Janet bent over Muriel. "You must accept."

Muriel watched the Prince leave the room. She could hear a faint rustle outside as he donned his coat. Her face grew pinched and miserable.

"I couldn't," she answered faintly.

Barney whispered to Janet. Janet nodded.

"I'm sorry," she said to Muriel. "It will compel me to dispose of the sum otherwise. I am sure that if I offered without interest and without a call date those millions to the treasury of Sabria--the loan would be accepted. It could stand forever. Rupert, in fact, wouldn't need to know--although I think he would accept it--for his people--even if you will not."

It was then that Muriel began to weep. Janet sat on the arm of her chair. Barney hastened to the hall where he found the Prince still lingering.

"You'd better come back," Barney said.

Rupert shook his head. "It was a mistake ever to come to this country. Valak's politics. I am relieved that he is gone. My father will be."

"Better come. Muriel's crying."

"Crying?" The voice of the Prince was incredulous. "Crying."

"I guess I'd better," Rupert said softly.

Douglas Avery went home alone. It was a beautiful night and the moon was shining. He tapped the sidewalk with his cane as he moved along. The emotional pageant of the past few months was now a memory. A memory that would return to him all the rest of his life--a memory that would be at some points full of violent fear and others flooded with appreciation of the heights to which individual human beings could rise.

Valak was packing in his hotel. He could see "his future--in Vienna or Paris. A noble without a coronet. A refugee of justice, living on a modest income, with nothing but newspapers and no code messages or whispering aides to inform him of the kingdoms of earth.

Muriel sat in the Prince's roadster and held his hand. "But she won't let you refuse it," he said. Muriel was evidently repeating a protest that she had made often in the last hour and a half. "She'll give the money to you or to Sabria.

"I'd like to say, 'Damn the money.' But it means so much to my country. Would you care for it, Muriel? Old houses and gardens? The castle and the country palace? The music is lovely. The wine is the best. But it's dull. It would be dull for you. We won't get to Nice or Paris often. I'll be too busy. I wouldn't be surprised if you'd find me running for president of a republic soon instead of wearing a crown that's already out of fashion by a hundred years and more."

"I could be first lady."

"You could."

"And"--Muriel smiled while she spoke--"it would be more fitting for a French farmer's daughter to be somebody in a democracy than queen in a kingdom."

Barney was petulant. "I don't deserve you. I've just dashed around--"

--and done all the work and supplied half the ideas--"

--like a leaping moron, Janet. A leaping moron."

"You make me tired," Janet said, interrupting him. "Here we are, wasting this fine moonlight and altogether forgetting the fact that in no time at all we're going to be married."

"Married," Barney echoed softly. "I'm not forgetting."

"Well?" She tried to move closer to him but it was not possible.

Chloe sat in her bedroom. She rocked and wondered what would become of her. Janet had promised to take care of her. Once that would have been a bitter dose, indeed, but now Chloe felt almost grateful for the assurance. She could be certain of one thing: never again would she have power over any human life but her own. Time had struck a belated balance. The estate of Daisy Storey and Jonathan Leigh was settled.

THE END